

**RECOVERY OF INDIGENOUS MODELS
OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE BLACK CHURCH**

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the Faculty of the Claremont School of Theology**

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by
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ABSTRACT

Recovery of Indigenous Models of Religious Education in the Black Church

by

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This dissertation presents a model of black religious education, drawing from the indigenous traditions of African traditional religion/societies, the slave community/religion in the United States, and an examination of community/religion contained in black interpretations of the Bible. This could be an effective educational model for the Black Church as it responds to the social disintegration and resultant nihilism within the contemporary black community.

The Introduction describes nihilistic currents that threaten the black community and the challenges they present to the Black Church and the black community at large. Chapter 1 surveys and critiques contemporary Christian education models/programs as they exist in the Black Church and as proposed by members of the academy. In Chapters 2 through 4 the argument is presented that three foundational sources served as the organizing basis for the independent Black Church in America and that each source contains distinctive educational goals and practices that defined the historic Black Church and can assist contemporary black churches combat nihilism. The three foundational sources are African traditional religion/societies, the slave community and biblical understandings of community/religion which informed the historic Black Church.

Chapter 5 constructs a Christian education model that incorporates elements gleaned from the three indigenous sources of the historic Black Church. The advantage of this model is that by incorporating a comprehensive approach to education in a cultural context intrinsic to black people, the systemic roots of nihilism can be addressed and its effect circumvented as the good news of the gospel spreads from the church to the community. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses the prototype of this model as practiced in St. Luke Tabernacle, Rochester, New

York. The major focus of the discussion is the effectiveness of the model within a black congregation as it seeks to address the spiritual and physical needs of its members and the broader community in which it is situated.

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INTRODUCTION

The problem being examined in this dissertation is the crisis within contemporary black Christian education posed by the pervasive, spirit-eroding nihilism present within the black community. Cornel West, a contemporary social critic, observes that nihilism is present within the black community as an ingrained spirit of hopelessness that paralyzes to such an extent that black people are “bringing closure upon themselves.”¹ This closure is expressed through rampant violence, voracious consumerism, a drug culture that has reached epidemic proportions,² disintegrating family structures, and swollen jail populations. The spirit of hopelessness is a result of the disintegration of positive, supportive social structures that provide nurture, guidance and a sense of community. When a person or community is left devoid of positive influences, maladaptive behaviors surface that ravish mind, body, spirit and community. In recent generations, the black community has known such social disintegration. Romney Moseley, observed that “chronic racism, segregation, unemployment and the increasing ‘underclass’ of the perennially poor, uneducated black youth, most of whom live in single-parent households in the inner cities constitute a dominate segment of the social infrastructure of the

¹Cornel West, The Cornel West Reader (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 293.

²There is a disparity in the sentencing policies between powder and crack cocaine. Crack cocaine carries a tougher sentence and is more accessible in economically challenged neighborhoods (it costs less).

black church.”³ The resources of the black community and the Black Church, both physical and fiscal have been severely strained because they have attempted to combat the plethora of nihilistic behaviors that plague their communities.

While nihilism is more visible in black communities that are economically challenged, the manifestations of nihilism affect all African-Americans in the United States regardless of their economic status or social location. Upper/middle income African-Americans can camouflage *some* of the affects of nihilism by retreating to suburban homes, six figure salaries and higher education. However, this retreat only reconfirms the disintegration of black social cohesion. Retreating into the illusions of the American dream seldom works for blacks because success does not ensure a black person a reprieve from racial discrimination. Systemic discrimination is pervasive in American culture, racial profiling is just one example. Racial profiling is the practice of “substituting skin color for evidence as a grounds for suspicion by law enforcement officials,”⁴ and blacks of all economic levels are targets throughout the country and world.

Nihilism, as previously stated, has the capacity to render one helpless and/or paralyzed. Upper/middle income African-Americans bring closure upon themselves in a plethora of ways. An age old spirit eroding choice made by blacks is the denial of their blackness. The practice of *passing* allows one to combat the woes inflicted upon one because

³Romney Moseley, “Retrieving Intergenerational and Intercultural Faith,” in Working with Black Youth: Opportunities for Christian Ministry, ed. Charles R. Foster and Grant S. Shockley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 79.

⁴American Civil Liberties Union Freedom Network, “Arrest the Racism: Racial Profiling in America,” available from <http://www.aclu.org/profiling/index.html>; Internet; accessed 7 January 01.

of skin color. Racial passing generally refers to a black person who is passing for white. Closure in this instance is the denial and devaluing of oneself. Social cohesion and solidarity among blacks deteriorates, creating a *them* and *us* within the black community, and an intense fear of being *found out*. These false distinctions are disastrous because blacks become alienated from one another, while simultaneously being targets. In effect, they are neither fish nor fowl.

Historically, the Black Church served as the major socializing center in the lives of black people. Carter G. Woodson, an educator/historian focusing on the education of black people in the United States has shown how the social cohesion uniting the black community was nurtured through the church. He maintained that in addition to spiritual guidance and moral training, the historic Black Church, before integration, provided the primary context for cultural and artistic expression, the nurturing of friendship and romance, the coordination of assistance for the needy, and education of the young, even strengthening its hold on youth about to go astray. Black people attended church whether they were Christians or not because the Black Church served a variety of social purposes, especially in light of the absence of alternate social outlets.⁵ The Black Church was at the center of other social structures (family, school, organizations, community) forming an ecology of interlocking systems dedicated to the nurture and corporate uplift of black people.

Integration struck a blow to the Black Church. No longer does it function in the ways described above. It has seen a decline in its ability to serve as the primary social center in the

⁵Carter G. Woodson, The History of the Negro Church (Washington: The Associated Publishers, 1972), 242-45.

black community because, in addition to the Black Church, other social outlets opened to black people, creating a diluted black community which adversely affected the Black Church. In addition to blacks gaining entry into other social outlets, the Black Church also lost some of its relevance in the black community. Most notably this was seen in its accommodation to integration. While black radicalism and nationalism was finding a voice, demanding inclusion and justice, many felt the Black Church had lost its militant voice.⁶

No longer do the middle class preacher, doctor and teacher live next door to the domestic worker. Many middle class blacks fled to the suburbs to attain a *better life* for their family while lower income families were left to fend for themselves. The black community now has no center for social cohesion to contend with the rising nihilism caused by class isolation. No social structure is serving the role previously served by the church. The educational challenge facing the Black Church is both spiritual and social, as it seeks to bring hope in the midst of nihilism, and to be a center of healing (spiritual, physical, and emotional) within the fragmented black community.

Presently, both the Black Church and black scholars are responding to this challenge. Because of the centrality of scripture in the Black Church, biblical instruction frames the core of all black Christian education, structured in numerous ways; Bible study, Sunday school, vacation Bible school, sacraments and liturgy, particularly through the sermon and hymnody. Such instruction seeks to teach the hope of the gospel. In addition, churches offer numerous educational programs responding to the social needs of the community such as self help

⁶Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People, 2^d ed. (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 135-91.

programs aimed at elevating the economic and social status of residents in a given neighborhood (e. g., computer training classes) and addressing nihilistic behavior (e. g., support groups for recovering addicts). These programs are inadequate however because they fail to tackle underlying systemic issues (e.g., racism, abject poverty, antiquated or inferior infrastructure) that cause nihilism in black communities. Further, these programs do not address the disintegration of the black community and fail to reincorporate individuals back into the church and community in positive ways.

Lincoln and Mamiya, relying on data collected by Reynolds Farley, state that “black economic progress since 1960 has been a mixed phenomenon, showing gains in areas like educational attainment and income but also a lack of progress in the unemployment of black men, rise in poverty rates, and high degrees of residential and school segregation.”⁷ An increase in those (black people) attaining middle-income status should not obscure the fact that there continues to be a disparity between blacks and other wage earners in the United States. According to the 2000 Census, the 1999 median income of blacks was \$27,910, while that of whites was \$44,366, and that of Hispanics was \$30,735.⁸ In every category, blacks represented the highest proportion of people living in poverty in the United States. The poverty level is based on a statistical formula of a family’s income developed by the Office of Management and Budget’s (OMB). The figures below represents the poverty thresholds

⁷Reynolds Farley, Blacks and Whites: Narrowing the Gap? (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), cited in The Black Church in the African American Experience, by C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 267.

⁸United States of America, “2000 Census,” available at <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2000/cb00-158.html>; Internet; accessed 7 January 01.

in 1999 for several family sizes randomly selected by the writer.

<u>Family Unit</u>	<u>Income Threshold</u>
1 (under 65 years of age)	\$ 8,667
1 (65 years of age and over)	7,990
3 (1 child under 18)	13,410
3 (2 children under 18)	13,423
5 (3 children under 18)	19,882
5 (4 children under 18)	19,578

32.7% of African American children under 18 lived in poverty in the United States in 1999.⁹

Lincoln and Mamiya, drawing on the work of William Julius Wilson in The Truly Disadvantaged, make the point that

the black poor, especially the underclass, lived in extremely deprived sectors of ghetto communities. Wilson argues, according to Lincoln and Mamiya, that the problems of the underclass are compounded because most of the upwardly mobile black people and their corresponding institutions have left the most deprived sectors of the ghetto, leaving the underclass more isolated and alienated. Prior to the civil rights period, there were black middle-class and working class role models and institutions like black churches available to help the truly disadvantaged. The industrial base of large cities such as factories and manufacturing industries has moved to the sunbelt or Third World countries so that the jobs which provided the typical entry level positions for the very poor are no longer available. Wilson feels that even the elimination of racism, which is often the goal of race-specific social policies, would not significantly affect the black poor unless something was done to change both the larger economy

⁹United States of America, "1999 Poverty Rates Reported in 2000 Census," available at <http://www.census.gov/hhs/poverty99/pv99est1.html>; Internet; accessed 7 January 01.

and the communities they live in.¹⁰

In addition to religious education programs at the parish level, black scholars are also addressing challenges facing religious education. The four most prominent black scholars providing leadership for religious education in the Black Church are: Grant Shockley, Romney Moseley, Ann Wimberly, and Joseph Crockett. Each of them contributes significant insights into religious education but their contributions need to be augmented by the development of a Christian education model primarily aimed at restoring an ecology of social cohesion in black communities.

Shockley's model of Black Church Systemic Intentional Engagement¹¹ concerns itself with liberation through socio-political consciousness and involves infusing both the learner and his/her community with a positive self image and a strong sense of cultural and religious identity. Although Shockley's model is viable, he failed to demonstrate how the model could actually be grounded in black churches to effectuate a liberative praxis that would combat nihilism or how the model would incorporate the wider black community.

Romney Moseley, writing from the standpoint of a pastoral theologian was concerned that the black churches recover one of its indigenous strengths, intergenerational faith with

¹⁰William Julius Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, The Underclass and Public Policy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) cited in Lincoln and Mamiya, 268.

¹¹Grant S. Shockley, "From Emancipation to Transformation to Consummation: A Black Perspective," in Does the Church Really Want Religious Education? An Ecumenical Inquiry, ed. Marlene Mayr (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1988), 221-48.

a commitment to justice that flows from religious faith.¹² Moseley rightly points out the need for intergenerational interactions but he did not fully develop an educational model that embodies and nurtures this intergenerational faith.

Both Wimberly and Crockett rely on educational practices rooted in the cultural experience and expression of black people, namely, the centrality of scripture (Crockett) and storytelling (Wimberly), both of which summons us to remember and re-institute the oral tradition lodged in black people's cultural heritage. Crockett teaches scripture in light of the experiences and traditions of African-Americans.¹³ Wimberly concerns herself with the genre of storytelling which connects components of everyday life stories with the Christian faith story found in Scripture. Storytelling is not limited to its entertainment value. For Wimberly stories become a means of critical reflection on liberation and vocation as inspired by God.¹⁴

Crockett and Wimberly present educational practices and methods that have the capacity to recapture indigenous teaching practices (storytelling), and focus on the Bible which is central to the life of the Black Church. However, neither educator offers a comprehensive approach that attends to the complexity of spiritual and social needs of members of black churches and communities that reflect an integrated system of care.

The Christian education programs developed and implemented by black churches, and those designed by black scholars, while serving a worthwhile purpose of connecting people

¹²Moseley, 77-97.

¹³Joseph V. Crockett, Teaching Scripture from an African-American Perspective (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1990), xii-xiii.

¹⁴Anne Streaty Wimberly, Soul Stories: African American Christian Education (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 11-13.

to cultural and religious heritages, remain compartmentalized and detached from the church's life and fail to capture the genius of the historic Black Church, that of fostering community through intergenerational interactions that thwarted the rampant effects of nihilism in the face of social strictures. Consequently, they do not address social disintegration.

Therefore, there is a need for an alternative religious education model that reclaims indigenous, socially cohesive learning/teaching models inherent in black culture that are better equipped at combating contemporary threats to the black community. I suggest that an approach that will assist the Black Church stave off the effects of nihilism is a return to *koinonia*, achieved through an intergenerational model that begins in the Black Church and extends into the broader community, retrieving practices that re-establish the Black Church as a major center for personal and social agency within the black community.

My thesis is that an intergenerational model of black religious education, drawing from the indigenous traditions of African traditional religion/societies, the slave community/religion in the United States, and an examination of community/religion contained in black interpretations of the Bible would be an effective educational model in responding to the social disintegration and resultant nihilism within the contemporary Black Church.

Chapter 1 surveys and critiques contemporary Christian education models/programs as they exist in the Black Church and as proposed by members of the academy. I will briefly describe a current practice of black Christian education and suggest a particular curriculum as representative of the dominant type of such education. I provide a principal critique of the Sunday school curriculum of St. Paul United Methodist Church, and the benefit(s) and limitation(s) of mass produced curriculum and its capacity to address social disintegration

within the black community. St. Paul's was selected as a study site for several reasons. First, it is the home parish of the writer, which lends familiarity. Further, seminal field work was conducted by the writer with this congregation.

In addition to critiquing St. Paul's Sunday school curriculum, I will survey, assess and critique the Christian education models/programs of the four black Christian educators/scholars previously outlined.

I argue in Chapters 2-4 that three foundational sources served as the organizing basis for the independent Black Church in America and that each source contains distinctive educational goals and practices that helped to define the historic Black Church and can assist contemporary black churches' combat nihilism. The three foundational sources are African traditional religion/societies, the slave community, and biblical understandings of community/religion which informed the historic Black Church. The three foundational sources flow from an examination of the Black Church contained in literary sources and cultural practices lodged in the Black Church and community. These sources surfaced as a result of self-description by the Black Church and from within the African American community.

Chapter 2 explores African traditional religion/society in relationship to its inherent educational practices. Here the goal and purpose of education is the establishment of the identity of the person in relation to his/her own community and in relation to God and the created order. Further, education is also focused on the preservation of the community, its traditions and values. The means by which this education is accomplished is through intergenerational storytelling, rituals, and the modeling of desired behavior. This education

is intergenerational because through it the culture, history, and religion of the group are passed down. The result of the educational process is the holistic *formation* of persons in the context of their community.

Chapter 3 examines slave religion/community in the United States in relation to its inherent educational practices. Here the goal and purpose of education are the survival of the identity of the person in relation to her/his own community and in relation to the false identity laid upon the slave by the dominant society. Further, education is also focused on the creation of a new community out of the memories of an African past, the encounter with the rhetoric of freedom and nationalism, as well as an emphasis on human dignity. The means by which this education is accomplished is through the raising of the socio-political consciousness of the individual through both oral and written texts. This education is intergenerational because through it the culture, history, and religion of the group adapts to novel situations for successive generations. The result of the educational process is that persons and communities are *in-formed* by the challenges of new surroundings and life circumstances.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the Bible as an important influence on the development of the educational practices in the African American Christian community. Here the goal and purpose of education are the recreation of identity against the backdrop of non-identity. In what sense is the identity of the people of Israel and the early Christian community, both as persons and as a group, given to them as a consequence of God's choice of them? The means by which this education is accomplished is through the recovery of a past given shape by the providence of God and a future grounded in the promise of God. Prayer, ritual, proverbs, and

other cultic acts are employed for this purpose. This education is intergenerational because it is founded on a people's history and hope, their past and their future. The result of the educational process is that persons and communities are transformed.

In Chapter 5 I construct a Christian education model that incorporates elements gleaned from the three indigenous sources of the historic Black Church. The model is intentionally communal and intergenerational, attending to the needs of parishioners in a holistic fashion (spiritual, physical, and emotional). The model is constructed in such a way that it recognized the five classical movements of Christian education in the life of the church (discussed at greater length in Chapter 5), and coordinates with other ministries to ensure a well integrated system of education and care. In this manner, ministry can be internally and externally focused. The vehicle for some Christian education experiences are fellowship opportunities that involve members and the wider community. Christian education in this manner assists with outreach, as a form of discipleship. The advantage of this model is that by incorporating a comprehensive approach to education in a cultural context intrinsic to black people (intergenerational learning and community), the systemic roots of nihilism can be addressed and its effect circumvented as the good news of the gospel spreads from the church to the community.

Finally, in Chapter 6 I discuss the prototype of this model as practiced at St. Luke Tabernacle, which is located in Rochester, New York. The major focus of the discussion is the effectiveness of the model within a black congregation as it seeks to address the spiritual and physical needs of its members and the community in which it is situated. St. Luke Tabernacle is a newly organized Christian fellowship, where the writer serves as the

minister/director of the Christian Education Department. Seminal field work with St. Paul UMC provided the rudimentary prelude for my work with St. Luke, proving that there was indeed value in implementing a Christian education model with a communal and intergenerational focus. (See Appendix A for a description of research conducted with St. Paul UMC.)

CHAPTER 1

SUMMARY AND CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION MODELS/PROGRAMS

This chapter provides a summary and critical assessment of current trends in religious education in the Black Church. I will examine a particular education model (Sunday school curriculum), used by one of the study congregations; and religious education models developed for use by the Black Church by four prominent black scholars.

Contemporary Practice of Black Christian Education

Because of the centrality of scripture in the Black Church, biblical instruction frames the core of Christian education structured in black congregations, in numerous ways, Bible study, Sunday school, vacation Bible school, and sacraments and liturgy, particularly through the sermon and hymnody. Such instruction seeks to teach the hope of the gospel. In this section, I will concentrate specifically on the adult Sunday school curriculum of St. Paul United Methodist Church as it is representative of the type of material used in Sunday schools in the Black Church. However, before examining the Sunday school material, an overview of the Sunday School Movement is provided.

The Sunday School Movement: A Brief Overview

The Sunday School Movement has its origins in England. Although debates continue over who began the Sunday School and where, Robert Raikes is considered the father of the

Sunday School Movement. In England, the Industrial Revolution prompted a great migration. People moved from small rural areas to urban centers, in search of jobs. With the mass migration, a chasm developed in social and economic classes, creating a huge under-class. What lay in part behind the formation of the Sunday school, was the desire to get mischievous lower class children off the street on Sunday (the only day they did not work). In 1780/81, Raikes began what is believed to be the first Sunday school class. He was preoccupied with reforming the morals of children of the lower class. Its purpose was to prevent vice, encourage hard work and virtue, eradicate ignorance, and to maintain the status quo by having people believe their station in life was God ordained.¹ The popularity of the Sunday School spread in large part through the work of the Sunday School Society which was founded on August 30, 1785. "The Society for Promoting Sunday Schools throughout the British Dominions later known as the Sunday School Society,"² provided financial support to hire teachers before Sunday schools were staffed by volunteers.

A decade after Raikes founded the Sunday school in England; the movement was transplanted to the United States. This transplantation happened in part because relationships between the two countries were maintained among individuals and denominations although the republics were at odds with one another. In the 1700s, various forms of religious instruction entered the United States through the work of missionaries. In the late 1700s the First Day Society began in Philadelphia. Like the English Sunday School Society, its purpose

¹Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, Big Little School: 200 Years of the Sunday School (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 25-26.

²James Reed and Ronnie Prevost, A History of Christian Education (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 259-60.

was to instruct poor children on Sunday.³

The Sunday school movements of England and America were similar and dissimilar. Each movement assumed evangelical overtones. This meant that the doctrine of innate depravity was stressed, a belief in future punishment was prevalent, and most importantly, the need for a personal experience of regeneration was advanced. Each anchored their teachings in religious/biblical instruction and taught reading. However, the American movement also incorporated writing. While the movement in England served only the poor, the constituency in America was broader.

In England, there was no intention of improving the socio-economic standing of those who participated in Sunday school. It was made clear from the outset that the Sunday school was a vehicle for moral development among the poor, not a way for them to attain upward mobility socially or otherwise. In both contexts, English and American, the church through their Sunday school activities, became a means of maintaining the status quo. Just as participants were limited by socio-economic standing in England, race alienated participants in America. Social pressure, not Christian witness, guided the Sunday school movement.⁴ Nonetheless, “in 1787 in Philadelphia, and in 1796 in New York, the AME and AMEZ Churches started the formation of school on Sunday The black Sunday school was called

³Anne M. Boylan, Sunday School: The Formation of An American Institution 1790-1880 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 7.

⁴Lynn and Wright, 35-38; and Reed and Prevost, 255-63.

the Sabbath School.”⁵ Since the founders of the AME and AMEZ Churches were from the Philadelphia area and were once members of white governed churches, it is feasible to assume they first came in contact with Sunday school in their previous worship environment. In newly formed black churches/denominations, the title of church school was changed from Sunday school to Sabbath School.

The Sabbath Schools followed the pattern of the public school except they primarily served church members. The subject matter, according to Olivia Pearl Stokes and Carter G. Woodson, was to provide training in morals. Sabbath Schools focused on literacy for black people, and it provided better knowledge of one’s Christian duty.⁶ In actuality, the mission of Sabbath School differed from that of mainline white Sunday schools only insofar as they continued teaching literacy skills (reading, writing, arithmetic) after such instruction was legally banned for Negroes in the United States.

In the 1850s Sunday school followed in the footsteps of public school by implementing uniform Sunday school curricula. These curricula began to be mass-produced and the teaching method employed therein was indoctrination. Although there was a concerted effort to use the Sunday school movement as the vehicle for proselytizing the Mississippi Valley, slavery prohibited the teaching of blacks. Education, secular or sacred, was perceived as too powerful a tool for blacks and slave insurrections were cited to justify this stance. Sabbath Schools functioned in a clandestine manner until the prohibition against

⁵Olivia Pearl Stokes, “The Educational Role of Black Churches in the 70s and 80s,” in New Roads to Faith: Black Perspectives in Church Education (Philadelphia:United Church Press, 1973).

⁶Ibid., 92.

literacy for Negroes was lifted. Since that time, Sunday school in the Black Church has been in lock step with its white counterparts, using mass produced curriculum which focus on religious, scripture based instruction.

The Sunday School Curriculum of St. Paul United Methodist Church

St. Paul United Methodist Church is located in Laurel, Mississippi, in the southeast area of state known as the Pine Belt region. Established in 1882, Laurel's present population is 18,881.⁷ The church is located on the east side of the city and is easily accessible by surface streets and I59 which runs from Chattanooga, Tennessee (North), to New Orleans, Louisiana (South). Accessibility to the church is prohibitive at times because of its proximity to Southern Railroad tracts. Both freight and passenger trains pass through the community, and, Laurel is a stop on Amtrak's passenger schedule.

Housing in the immediate area of St. Paul (five mile radius) is of two types; single family, single story, and two public housing developments. The former is approximately forty to fifty year old wood frame, three bedroom homes, while the latter are brick units, constructed in the late 1960's. The housing, regardless to the category is neat although in need of repair and modernizing. Homeowners in the area are elderly, 60+ years of age, while residents in the housing developments tend to be younger with children. The population of the neighborhood is predominantly black (99%), and the economic status of its residents range from lower income to lower middle class.

⁷Laurel, Mississippi, "History," available from <http://www.laurelms.com/>; Internet; accessed 13 September 00.

With transportation, any part of the city can be reached within 10-15 minutes. There is no public transportation in Laurel and the lion share of employment opportunities are within poultry, manufacturing (primarily related to electronics), health care (hospital, clinics, doctor's offices), and education (10 area schools; 7 public, 3 private). Laurel has fast food chains as well as other types of family style restaurants, a small shopping center, several hotels and grocery stores and a modern (condo-type) retirement community.

Founded in 1896, St. Paul has approximately 135 members, 80 of whom are actively involved and attend regularly. Approximately 60% of the active members are youth and the membership and pastor are black. The pastor, Rev. Mattie D. Gipson has been at St. Paul since graduating with an M. Div. Degree in 1997 from the Candler School of Theology, Atlanta, Georgia.

St. Paul's Sunday school curricula is purchased through its denominational (United Methodist) publishing house. Lessons in the curriculum are based on the International Sunday School Lessons for Christian Teaching, copyright © 1996, by the Committee on the Uniform Series. Among other things what this means is that St. Paul, along with every other church, regardless of location or denomination, is using a mass produced, non-contextual curriculum if they subscribe to the Uniform Series. The Committee on the Uniform Series or International Lesson System was founded in 1872.⁸ Today, "sixty-seven persons representing twenty-two denominations, form the committee which meets annually. They are working on

⁸Committee on the Uniform Series, Ministries in Christian Education, "Our Heritage in the Uniform Series, 1872-1997". Division of Christian Education, Inc., (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A., 1997), 4.

outlines for the years 2004 to 2010.”⁹ The uniform principle means “that everyone in church school on a given Sunday would study the same passage of Scripture.”¹⁰ It is estimated that the readership of the Uniform Series is roughly 130 million people.¹¹

Mass produced curriculums do have benefits. In churches where teachers and the religious education staff are volunteers, having a standardized curriculum assures: 1) a thoroughly developed lesson plan that ensures lessons are at least present, 2) a sense of security for teachers and staff who lack theological training or other levels of education that would equip them to plan effectively, and 3) a broad range of subject matter. No curriculum is neutral. As stated earlier, the primary teaching method of mass produced curricula is indoctrination. Therefore, my critique of mass produced Sunday school curricula is twofold. First, it is not contextual and second an ideology may be put forth that is contrary to that of a particular congregation. The limits of this curriculum are seen by exploring a representative unit within it.

In the adult Sunday school curriculum used by St. Paul in July 2000, the unit theme was **Called to Be a New Humanity**. Specific lessons for the month were: Claim our Spiritual Blessings (July 2), Claim Your New Status (July 9), Claim your Ministry (July 16), Claim Your Responsibility (July 23), and Claim Your Power Base (July 30).¹² When the

⁹Committee on the Uniform Series. *Ministries in Christian Education*, “History,” available from <http://www.nccusa.org/nmu/mce/csl.html>; Internet; accessed 7 January 01.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Barbara Tilley, interview by author, 13 Dec. 2000, New York, telephone conversation, Committee on the Uniform Series, New York.

¹²Adult Bible Studies (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2000), 33-67.

Sunday school curriculum was published in Nashville, it was impossible for the publishers to know that in July 2000, in Laurel and its surrounding area a suspected lynching would be occupying the minds of local residents. Did the pre-designed curriculum address lynching? During the month of July, did St. Paul's Sunday school teachers address lynching and its sordid history in the state? Was lynching incorporated into the sermon? Did church members and the pastor play visible roles in addressing not only that particular suspected lynching but injustice as a whole? The publishing house could not have known in advance about the lynching because it happened in a context different from and geographically removed from Nashville. Secondly, Sunday school lessons are printed on a quarterly basis, outlined years in advance. The specific curriculum in question for July was already a month old because the quarter began in June. Lastly, because it is a uniform lesson, context is never an issue and therefore, Sunday school lessons that are presented just as they are, are irrelevant to the lived reality of real people in real situations. Contextualization is important in Christian education and the life of a black congregation because people want religion that is pertinent to their lived reality. Further, they want to know that their experiences are validated.

The goal of religious education in the Black Church must concern itself at all times with liberation and empowerment. According to Paulo Freire, liberation or freedom "is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an ideal which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition of the quest for human completion."¹³ Olivia Pearl Stokes says that the task of liberation must be undertaken by black people for themselves

¹³Olivia Pearl Stokes, citing Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).

and their white oppressors Liberation education believes in the Christian concept of reconciliation, a process in which simultaneously teachers and students are at one time or the other learners or teachers . . . engaged in critical thinking [about] the quest for mutual divine humanization.¹⁴

In the case of the suspected lynching, the quest for “mutual divine humanization” required religious education that condemned the dehumanization of human beings from a spiritual and psychological perspective. In this way victim, victimizer and the entire community, black and non-black could pursue a liberative praxis that does not condone predatory behavior which destroys mind, body or spirit.

Summary and Critical Assessment of Four Christian Education Programs/Models

The four most prominent black scholars providing leadership for religious education for the Black Church are Grant Shockley, Romney Moseley, Ann Wimberly, and Joseph Crockett. Each of them contributes significant insights into religious education for the Black Church that lead the church and inform this present project. However, each is limited as well.

Grant Shockley

Grant Shockley’s model of Christian education is outlined as part of a broader agenda in which religious education in mainline Protestant churches is critiqued from an African American perspective, and in which religious education in the African American church is assessed as either functional or dysfunctional in relation to the African American community.¹⁵

The critique of Protestant churches is based in the evolution of racial attitudes in the

¹⁴Stokes, 95, 97.

¹⁵Shockley, 222.

churches during slavery and in the evolution of the Sunday school movement after emancipation.

Early efforts toward the religious education of blacks by Protestants were often inspired by high ideals. Actually, many of their efforts were later compromised and subverted through involvement with those who were engaged in slavery and in slave trading Thus, while educational missions by Protestants antedated any other organized effort to improve the condition of slave illiteracy, much if not most of this 'religious education' was in reality a travesty. This so-called religious education was often little more than a truncated version of biblical knowledge accommodated to the interests of slave holders.¹⁶

Christian education needed and continues to need to be rescued from its ideological and political captivity. It needs to be committed to the notion of liberation which is at the heart of the Protestant spirit.

The adequate response to this critique is through the re-conceptualization of Christian education in the Protestant context. That is, "through religious education Protestant Christians should claim their call is to eradicate situations of oppression in their denominations, church parishes, communities, nation, and the world."¹⁷

Shockley's critique of the traditional African American church, drawing on the work of E. Franklin Frazier, is based on its historical response to the emergence of class stratifications within and the influence of secularism from without.

The black church provided a structure for the black community, as well as a spiritual and social center. It also began to reflect a growing

¹⁶Ibid., 228. This statement by Shockley is an example of how the Sunday school curriculum has been used as a tool of indoctrination by the status quo, those controlling the printing press and the *power*.

¹⁷Ibid., 232.

‘class’ differentiation pattern. At first this pattern resembled pre-Emancipation distinctions based on roles, skin coloration, family connections, and education. As comparable, though segregated, educational opportunities became available to blacks in the North (and the West), social class differentiation began to reflect itself in relation to occupational status, i.e., working-class, middle-class, professional-class.¹⁸

While class threatens to blunt the force of the gospel within the Black Church, the onslaught of secularism threatens to erase the powerful distinctiveness of the Black Church in relation to the society at large. This was especially true as the Black Church and black religious expression continued to emerge from cultural isolation begun in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Secularization affected the black church in three important ways: 1) It influenced churches and church members to become more tolerant of recreational activities such as dancing which was formerly associated with ‘sin’; 2) it activated an awareness of social issues and patterns which drew church members and their churches into community and political involvement; 3) it motivated new interest in applying general business and organizational procedures to church management and fund-raising.¹⁹

While the social factors of class and secularization have impacted the Black Church to a large degree according to Shockley, there are two other factors which have more directly influenced its educational approach and programs.

Religious education in the traditional black church, namely, the black church from Emancipation (1863) to the black revolution (1966), can best be understood and traced in its two major developments: black denominational churches and churches in white denominations.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., 237.

¹⁹Ibid., 238.

²⁰Ibid.

Within historically African American denominations the development of Christian education closely followed the historical development of the denominations. As these denominations grew in numbers of members, they developed their own educational methods and materials.

On any Sunday morning, millions of black children, youth, and adults could be found in thousands of Sunday Schools being taught by thousands of black volunteer teachers, black leaders from the church and the immediate black community.²¹

Black congregations within predominantly white denominations presented a different picture. Christian education in this setting focused on consolidating the class values which black and white members had in common while affirming an assimilationist posture on race relations. Shockley notes that in these settings the value systems supported were distinctly *middle-class* and that the socio-political stance reflected “a moderate conservatism.”²²

Shockley’s critique of the African American churches, both independent and those connected with historically white denominations, is that their educational approach reflected that of white Protestant churches. Those African American congregations connected with white Protestant denominations often used educational materials designed by and for the larger group. Even when independent African American churches designed their own educational materials, these materials were practically indistinguishable, in method, structure, and content from those of white denominations. This educational approach, according to Shockley, did not take into account the changed circumstances and needs of the African American Christian community.

²¹Ibid., 239.

²²Ibid., 239-40.

Shockley challenged the African American church to reshape its approach to Christian education to reflect a new understanding of ministry within the Black Church. Shockley proposes that a new Black Church educational design should be based on the following assumptions, namely that education must be open to change, it must be prophetic, it must be liberative, it must be mission oriented, and it must be grounded in the genius of the Black Church.²³

On the basis of these assumptions, Shockley proposed a model for African American Christian education. This *Intentional Engagement Model* is grounded in black theology of liberation as articulated by James Cone; in the theory of liberative praxis put forward by Paulo Freire; and in Gayraud S. Wilmore's articulation of a new Black Church style. Black theology says that any educational model for the African American church must understand the content of the gospel to be the liberation of the poor and oppressed. The liberative praxis theory of Freire says that any educational practice either promotes oppression or promotes liberation. Freire's work among South American peasants reveals the fact that no educational practice is politically neutral, and that education can be a powerful tool for uplift among the poor and dispossessed. Wilmore's new Black Church style suggests that the church must always interface with the community and its problems. Wilmore insists that the radical character of black religious expression must be intentionally transmitted from one generation to the next through relevant Christian education within the Black Church.

Shockley's model has six basic components. It involves *self-awareness*, which means that Christian education should teach people to regard themselves as subject rather than

²³Ibid., 244-45.

objects in their own history. It involves *social awareness*, which means that Christian education should bring the real issues and problems which affect the community to the forefront in its teaching. It involves *social analysis*, which means that Christian education should assist persons in developing a critical eye through which to assess and transcend oppressive situations. It involves *transformation*, which means that concrete examples and models of liberated living ought to be part of the curriculum of black Christian education. It involves *praxis*, which means that persons are encouraged to engage in significant acts of resistance against oppression within their lives. Finally, it involves *the community* as the actual site of Christian education which means that Christian education is not confined to the sanctuary. Christian education activities which would demonstrate this model might include the analysis of social action initiatives in the African American community as they relate to the gospel using the five steps listed above.

Shockley's *Intentional Engagement Model* of Christian education presents the African American church with both a task and a question. The task is to draw from its own past the resources necessary for relevant and effective Christian education today. He notes that the "pre-Emancipation era in the history of the black church provides the best setting from which a definition of religious education among black people can be taken. Key words in that definition are: indigenous, relevant and functional."²⁴ Thus, the task of religious education in the African American church is to explore and rediscover its own treasures and to pass them along to successive generations. Shockley maintained that the Black Church really desires to do Christian education. "The fundamental question is, however, are they ready to

²⁴Ibid., 247.

commit themselves to the accomplishment of the radical changes and realignments that their religious education programs require to implement the liberation objectives of the new black church?"²⁵ For Shockley, the future of Christian education in the African American church depends on the answer to that question.

Shockley's model is largely inferred from the larger context of his writings. Thus, the model is not presented in its fully developed form. Shockley's contribution to the model being presented in this dissertation is the insistence that intergenerational black Christian education be *engaged* in the liberation struggle of the black community, and that it looks to its past for guidance.

Romney M. Moseley

Romney M. Moseley suggested an outline for black Christian education as part of a larger concern for the survival and nurture of African American youth in general. He noted that the African American community suffered from a litany of social problems, including unemployment, homelessness, a lack of education, and drug addiction. He observes that

these perennial social problems have always been the concern of the black church. However, the church is not an invincible bastion immune to the social ills facing black society. Chronic racism, segregation, unemployment and the increasing 'underclass' of perennially poor, uneducated black youth, most of whom live in single-parent households in the inner cities constitute a dominant segment of the social infrastructure of the black church.²⁶

Thus the ministry of the African American church has been compelled to deal, either directly or indirectly with the concrete social ills in the black community. To address these problems

²⁵Ibid., 248.

²⁶Moseley, 79.

the African American church is pulled in two contradictory directions. It can promote values which are consistent with those of the dominant society, or it can emphasize the distinctiveness of the cultural resources available to the African American community.

Therefore, the black church finds itself with the problem of fostering positive images of success and productivity for its youth while maintaining its historic commitment to social justice. It cannot be content to cultivate a new black elite as the matrix of social transformation. Any attempt to create a cordon of middle class blacks is subversive. It undermines the tradition of the extended family by which blacks exercise reciprocal obligations across distinctions of class and transmit faith from one generation to another.²⁷

The promotion of middle class values has been a part of African American Christianity since the middle of the nineteenth century. At the same time, it is the primary organization for persons who are in, or struggling at the edges of the black underclass, and for whom the extended family is the primary survival network.

In light of the importance of the family in the transmission of African American faith, it is surprising, notes Moseley that, “[n]o studies of intergenerational faith in the histories of black families are available to document its importance.”²⁸ Thus, avoiding the pitfalls of class distinctions and promoting the role of the family in the rearing of youth are priorities for the Black Church.

The survival of America’s black youth depends on the protection of the extended family and the bridging of boundaries of class and caste [T]o avoid further fragmentation of black America along class lines, the black church must adopt a clearly defined and pragmatic theological hermeneutic to guide its ministries. This approach must be grounded in the interdependence of scripture and the daily

²⁷Ibid., 82-83.

²⁸Ibid., 83.

experience of black Americans in order to illumine the meaning of life.²⁹

According to Moseley, the African American church needs to attend to two distinct but interrelated tasks in order to strengthen its ministry. First it must mine the resources of the ecumenical church in its development of its ministry among youth.

If the black church is to effectively develop youth leadership, it must adopt a strong ecumenical identity. This has been a major problem for the black church America's black youth can ill afford further isolation from the efforts of the global church to stand in solidarity with the oppressed.³⁰

Second, the African American church must explore its own indigenous resources for communicating the historic faith of the church to others.

The contemporary social situation demands that the church retrieve its militant heritage as an arena for dialogue on any moral, political, economic, and spiritual issues confronting black identity formation Reconnecting black youth to their ancestral heritage and transmitting intergenerational faith is the responsibility of the black church.³¹

Thus, the African American church must attend to its horizontal relationships with other churches and church related organizations in order to provide black youth with a critical perspective. Within these intercultural relationships "they discover the interconnectedness of global power relationships and their relevance to structural poverty in black America and

²⁹Ibid., 83-84.

³⁰Ibid., 86, 89.

³¹Ibid., 88-89.

in the so-called third world.”³² The African American church is also called upon to pass down the treasures of its history.

The precariousness of the contemporary social situation demands that the church—the *oikos* or household of God—make every effort to maintain a positive environment where youth are mentored in constructive leader-follower relationships and the virtues of wisdom, hope, and faith of the black historical experience are transmitted from generation to generation.³³

Romney Moseley’s suggestive proposals for the education and training of youth in the African American church are only indirectly focused on the tasks of Christian education per se. His broader concern is the reconceptualization of ministry among and for the youth of the black Church. However, the insights which he provides can be helpful in molding a program of Christian education. His first insight is that the problems which confront African American youth are both the cause and symptoms of what we have identified as nihilism within the black community. The church and especially black theologians have, in Moseley’s estimation, failed to adequately address these problems. This is one of the critical differences between the proposals of Shockley and Moseley. Whereas Shockley’s estimation of the usefulness of black theology is high, Moseley has argued that “black theology has failed to have any significant impact as a practical guide to social transformation.”³⁴ Moseley’s second insight is that the Black Church through both its own internal choices as well as through the racism of the wider church, has not been a significant part of ecumenical work. Hence, black

³²Ibid., 96.

³³Ibid., 97.

³⁴Ibid., 84.

youth have been deprived of learning and experiencing problems in a global setting. His third insight is that the Black Church has not employed its own indigenous resources in addressing the problems that it faces. Thus, the black church has minimized its own power. These insights, properly conceptualized, could strengthen a program of Christian education.

The primary limitation of Moseley's analysis is its focus on black youth, whereas, black Christian education in this model is intergenerational. Moseley's contribution to the model being presented in this dissertation is the insistence that black Christian education be framed within a broader cultural and ecclesial context, including Africa.

Anne Streaty Wimberly

Anne Streaty Wimberly, in her book Soul Stories: African American Christian Education, proposes a model for Christian education deeply rooted in African American experience and culture. Her model "draws on the Christian education approaches initiated during the slavery era. It entails a teaching/learning process focused on liberation and vocation."³⁵ This model is based on the concept of story-linking.

Story-linking is a process whereby persons connect components of their everyday life stories with the Christian faith story found in Scripture More specifically, persons link with Bible stories/texts by using them as a mirror through which they reflect critically on the liberation and vocation they have already found or are still seeking. This linkage helps persons to discern the liberating activity of God and God's call to vocation—living in the image of Christ—in both biblical and present times.³⁶

There are five assumptions which support this model. This model assumes that

³⁵Wimberly, 13.

³⁶Ibid.

Christian education can be strengthened by recovering the story-linking process as it existed within the slave community. It assumes that this process is by its very nature suited to intergenerational settings. It assumes that persons are better able to make connections between their own life stories and the stories found in the Bible by focusing on the similarity of the fundamental issues which both sets of stories address. It assumes that this model will facilitate the effectiveness of Christian education programs both in the church and in the community. Finally, it assumes that teachers and learners will benefit from the story-linking process. Wimberly suggests that the twin aims of Christian education in this model, liberation and vocation, are closely related. Human beings have the innate desire and the biblical mandate to be free. This freedom, however, is not simply the absence of restrictions, but serves the purpose of doing something with one's life. Thus, persons do not simply seek *freedom to be*, but *freedom to do*. This means that Christianity and culture must be related in a specific way.

Christian educators in African American settings are challenged to provide a Christian education for liberation and vocation. This involves both the *content* or basic meanings of liberation and vocation from an African American Christian perspective and a culturally sensitive *process*.³⁷

This model suggests that instead of scripture, or tradition, or reason, "the starting point of Christian education for liberation and vocation should be the everyday life stories we face"³⁸ and that the purpose of this education is to reconnect us with the historic faith of our foremothers and forefathers. By engaging in this process it becomes possible to "create

³⁷Ibid., 31.

³⁸Ibid., 32.

spaces where intergenerational dialogue can take place and where socio-economic differences are transcended.”³⁹ This model in action might include the analysis of news accounts where the question of the relation between the stories within black experience and stories contained in scripture is asked. An example might relate the racially motivated murder of James Byrd in Texas⁴⁰ to biblical stories of martyrs.

There are three major facets to this model of African American Christian education. First, it assists persons explore their own identity in relation to the world around them.

The African American story is about a people who continue to ask, Who am I? in the midst of society’s assaults to their dignity. The question, Who am I?, centers on our self-identity, and that identity is shaped in our homes, communities, and churches, as well as in the larger social context.⁴¹

This model of Christian education explores this question of self-identity in a relational context. It suggests that, as in African traditional religion, one cannot address this question in an individualistic manner. That is, *who I am* can only be adequately addressed in the context of *who we are*. It also suggests that this question cannot be addressed only in relation to the spiritual dimensions of our being. Identity is, in part, shaped by the socio-political contexts in which we exist. For example, Christian education activities might explore the story of James Byrd in Texas and lead the learner to ask “Who am I and where am I in this story?” In addition, this model implies that this question cannot be adequately addressed in

³⁹Ibid., 33.

⁴⁰On June 7, 1998, James Byrd, a black man, was dragged to his death in Jasper, Texas, by three white men. Chained to the back of their pick-up truck, Byrd’s body was dismembered.

⁴¹Ibid., 49.

terms of present experience alone. Our identity is also shaped by those generations which have preceded us. Wimberly notes that

[w]hen we value ourselves the way God values us, we open ourselves to a variety of dimensions of liberation. We begin to see possibilities we had not heretofore imagined. We become better able to perceive not only who and Whose we are, but also who we can become.⁴²

This model of Christian education can assist persons whose sense of identity has been and continues to be assailed by the forces of nihilism in contemporary society. Nihilism presents our stories as having only dead ends and tragic conclusions. This model of Christian education insists that at the end of our story is life, not death; hope, not despair.

The second facet of this model is that it assists persons in exploring the events and interpersonal relationships within one's life through this story-linking method.

Interpersonal relationships are the associations and connections we make with other people. We relate to family members, extended family, and friends. We have church, school, and work relationships.

Closely associated with these interpersonal relationships are those life events which mark significant transitions and changes in our lives.

Life events include crises such as illness, hospitalization, disabling conditions, death, unfair treatment, broken relationships, job loss, homelessness, and incarceration. They entail positive incidents such as gratifying memories, life-changing religious experiences, promotions, honors, mended relationships, and reunions. They also include incidents that mark stages of our lives, such as marriage, childbirth, school graduations, separation, divorce, becoming orphaned or widowed, and entering or exiting a chosen life-style or

⁴²Ibid., 50.

occupation.⁴³

Black Christian education should teach people the *skills* and *knowledge* to get through the transitions of divorce, graduation, or loss. These life events could actually become the content of individual lessons in a Christian education program.

Here it is important to note that relationships and life events must be seen in relation to one another. This model suggests that, as in African traditional religion, relationships are composed of shared life events in which two or more persons find themselves engaged in establishing, maintaining or repairing harmonious relationships. Life events are those periodic moments when two or more persons find themselves compelled to reassess or readjust their interpersonal relationships. This model of Christian education can assist persons who are undergoing life's crises and struggling to nurture interpersonal relationships to see that the two tasks are connected and important.

The third facet of this model of Christian education is that it can assist persons who, through their search for identity, and through their endurance in moments of crisis find meaning in their lives. Wimberly observes that

our meaning-making is our attempt to bring order and purpose in our lives. Meaning-making is our way of saying, 'This is how I see life and my place in it, and this is what I'm going to do about it.' How we fill in and act on the details contributes to our story plot. And how our story plot unfolds contributes to our ongoing meaning-making. So, life-meanings and story plots are very much related.⁴⁴

Each person, according to Wimberly, arrives at meaning in his or her life because of the inner

⁴³Ibid., 70.

⁴⁴Ibid., 92.

structure, or story plot of their lives. This plot is not static but rather unfolds over the course of time. This plot is not completely determined. Because it is not fate, persons can, to a great degree, determine the direction of this plot.

Our plot is defined by an undergirding theme in our lives. This theme is our dominant approach to life. How we act on our approach to life forms our purpose or the direction we choose to go in life. This contributes to the character of our unfolding plot.⁴⁵

These plots can be either liberating or oppressive, and the meaning assigned to life's events through these plots will reflect their character. Christian education has the task of helping persons to discover and assign meaning to life's events through the articulation of the plots of their life stories. By connecting a person's story plot to that of the Christian story, persons caught in fatalism and nihilism can discover hidden meanings in their lives and new, liberating ways to view the call of God upon their lives.

Wimberly argues that the everyday life stories of individuals are the starting point of African American Christian education. Through these stories persons can understand themselves and their place in the world; they can better see the connection between the events of their lives and the interpersonal relationships in which they are involved; and they can find and assign meaning to their lives through examining the story plots within them and relating them to the Christian story. In all these facets the Bible is important.

In story-linking, the Bible is a pivotal sense-making document From our linking with the Bible, we are challenged to see its impact for our lives and discern how to embody its message in our lives. We link with the Bible by bringing our everyday stories as African Americans with us. We enter the Bible with our joys. We also enter with our struggles related to experiences of oppression in this country

⁴⁵Ibid., 93.

and other everyday life struggles that block and bind us. We view and respond to the Bible through the lens of all that makes up our self-identities, social contexts, interpersonal relationships, life events, life meanings, and story plots.⁴⁶

Wimberly suggests that there are three major ways of choosing scripture to relate to our life stories. They are the historical cultural approach, the lectionary approach, and the uniform lesson series approach. The lectionary approach focuses on the interpretation of texts as found in the lectionaries used in major church bodies. The limitation of this approach is that the texts are not chosen with the historic experience of African American Christianity in mind. The limitation of the uniform lesson series approach is that the frames of reference do not center on African American experience. Of these three, Wimberly argues that the historical cultural approach to selecting scripture is most suited for Christian education in the African American context. This approach is grounded in the cultural and religious history of African American Christians and provides a natural invitation to dialogue and learning..

One way of determining what Bible stories/texts to use for story-linking in African American settings is to look at stories/texts already chosen by African Americans across the years Dating back to slavery, African Americans have had a strong biblical orientation and have relied on specific stories/texts for help in the throes of trials and tribulations.⁴⁷

For Wimberly, scripture is never approached apart from the explanatory structures of our own stories. The process of Christian education is designed to bring the learner to an appreciation of the meaning of their lives so that the scripture may come alive for them. In essence, Christian education in the African American community assists persons in reading the Bible

⁴⁶Ibid., 116.

⁴⁷Ibid., 117.

in light of the ongoing revelation of God in their lives. This approach to Christian education suffers, somewhat, from a lack of balance between the authority of experience and the normative role of scripture. However, the contribution of Wimberly's approach to the model of black Christian education being presented in this dissertation is a focus on the role of black history and culture.

Joseph V. Crockett

Joseph V. Crockett, in his book Teaching Scripture From An African-American Perspective, presents a model of Christian education which focuses on the role of cultural integrity in the teaching/learning process.

For Christian education to be effective in African American communities, it must have cultural integrity with the African-American experiences and traditions Christian education for the Black church involves, fundamentally, processes of teaching scripture in light of the experiences and traditions of African Americans.⁴⁸

In this context the cultural integrity in Christian education refers to its fit with the values and experiences of the African American community. The implications of this method of doing Christian education are threefold. First, it provides an educational process which recognizes that learning in this context involves both an external source of knowledge (scripture) and an internal source of knowledge (culture). Second, while cultural traditions are respected in this model, it also allows for the emergence of new meanings within those traditions. Third, it provides ways for the community to compare and contrast various versions of the historical experiences of the community. In essence, it provides a way to critique our stories in helpful ways. Not all African Americans experience life in exactly the same ways. Something can

⁴⁸Crockett, xii-xiii.

be learned from urban, suburban, rural, Northern, and Southern varieties of that experience.

This model of Christian education in the African American church is based on four distinct strategies for teaching scripture. The first is *The Story Strategy of Education* and is focused on the issues of identity and vocation.

‘Story’ is the metaphorical reference for this strategy. The metaphor of *story* has at least three dimensions. One, *story* refers to the history of African Americans. Two, *story* is used to refer to particular passages from scripture The third dimension of *story* emphasizes its theological aspects. It refers to the drama of God’s actions in history.⁴⁹

In this context, as in the model presented by Wimberly, stories provide an avenue to the inner experiences of persons and communities. These stories also provide a means by which persons and communities can understand their social or collective experiences as well.

This strategy recalls and reinvigorates a major tradition within African religion. In African traditional religion, stories are one of the means by which history is preserved and transmitted, and wisdom is shaped and shared. The telling and retelling of stories can also bring into being something that did not exist before. “Storytelling in the oral tradition enables personal perception to interact with social experience. The interaction itself is something other than either the personal perception or the social experience was alone. The dynamic interaction creates a new reality.”⁵⁰

This strategy, like all of the others, is focused on teaching scripture. For Crockett, this is the fundamental aim of Christian education in the African American context. In this

⁴⁹Ibid., 1, emphasis added by Wimberly.

⁵⁰Ibid., 2.

sense, Crockett's focus on scripture is stronger than that in the other thinkers discussed.

The primary purpose of the story strategy is to teach the scripture Scripture contains an account of God's intentions for creation, what has gone wrong, God's response to what has gone wrong, and God's hope for what creation can become. God's activity recorded in scripture makes possible our discovery of God's activity in the world today.⁵¹

Crockett's emphasis on scripture derives from his argument that one's life stories need to be critiqued from the point of view of a biblical norm. He notes that "the stories by which persons live support their perspectives and behaviors. Yet, if change and growth are to occur, these stories need to be examined in light of scripture."⁵² In Crockett's view, it is essentially the biblical story that ought to undergird and affirm the cultural stories of the African American community,

The story strategy is designed to teach scripture to African American Christians in ways that affirm our culture and influence our understanding of ourselves and our place in God's world The story strategy of education provides us as African American Christians the cultural context in which to explore and reflect critically on the various aspects of our lives."⁵³

The second strategy on which Crockett's model of Christian education is based is the *exile* strategy. This aspect of Christian education addresses those practical dimensions of Christian life. Christian education in the African American community should have significant implications for the way that people live and move in society.

An exile strategy of education is developed to encourage persons to

⁵¹Ibid., 8, 9.

⁵²Ibid., 10.

⁵³Ibid., 13-14.

employ the scripture in their conduct and relations. Meaning can emerge through the ordering of one's actions and behavior—what persons do and what persons desire to become.⁵⁴

The exile strategy focuses on that aspect of African American experience in which persons are acutely aware of their need for wholeness and a sense of belonging.

The theme of 'exile' is used as an interpretive 'lens' to focus this educational strategy. Teaching scripture through the lens of exile makes it possible to address the human longing for harmony.⁵⁵

Through an educational method of *social interaction and participation* Crockett argues that this strategy helps persons overcome feelings of dislocation and alienation. More importantly, this strategy acknowledges that there is a connection between how persons perceive themselves in relation to the world in which they live, and how they interact with that world.

This strategy's aim is to empower persons to move toward harmony with all of God's creation by engaging the scripture in practical conduct. Africans did not distinguish between what they believed and how they acted.⁵⁶

In this case, if Christian education is going to address the human longing for harmony with all of creation, then it will have to concern itself with those social forces which cause disharmony. An example would be current discussions regarding the need to affirm the cultural identity of African Americans and the desire to recognize the contributions of African Americans to the construction of American culture as a whole.

The third strategy on which Crockett's educational model is based is that of

⁵⁴Ibid., 15.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., 26.

sanctuary. This strategy emphasizes the fact that God dwells with and among people.

The sanctuary strategy of education is grounded in the understanding that God is ever-present and that God's omnipresence makes possible the transformation of every ordinary place into a sacred place.⁵⁷

The search for sanctuary, or a safe place to worship and to be in the presence of God has long been a part the African American experience. Early Christian slaves had to worship in secret hush harbors and fields in order to praise God away from the scrutiny of slave holders. First century Christians had to meet in caves and tunnels to avoid persecution. The people of Israel laboring in Egypt were compelled to seek a way to worship their God in spite of Pharaoh's objection. Thus, sanctuary has been related to the need for a space to be and to become.

In African-American culture the sanctuary has been a special place. Sanctuary has been the physical place where individual and collective self-identity has been formed, informed, and transformed. The sanctuary has been a special place where people find assurance that they have not been abandoned.⁵⁸

It is important to emphasize that the primary purpose of sanctuary was worship. Therefore, Crockett correctly relates the need for sanctuary with the idea of worship of God.

The sanctuary strategy of education understands and makes use of worship as a patterned event for making meaning in the lives of learners. The nature of the rhythm, process, and structure of worship itself (or other patterned rituals) shapes the nature of the information and experience to be reflected on.⁵⁹

Like the other strategies in this model the "sanctuary strategy of education has the

⁵⁷Ibid., 28.

⁵⁸Ibid., 29.

⁵⁹Ibid., 31.

teaching of scripture as its primary goal It prepares learners to recognize God's presence in their midst, and it challenges persons to come to know God's reality."⁶⁰ This means that Christian education is done in the presence of God and within the context of the gathered community of the faithful. Therefore, one should not lose sight of the fact that the church remains the generative center of Christian education.

The fourth strategy upon which Crockett's model is based focuses on the paradigm of *exodus*. Here Crockett argues that this strategy can assist persons in understanding the hope which gives character and purpose to their community. The metaphor of exodus was central to the self-understanding of the community of Israel, and throughout history, has been a powerful symbol for communities seeking to define their vocation and mission in difficult socio-political circumstances. This is especially true for African Americans.

African Americans have heard and used the exodus story as a song of hope. The African slaves inherited the exodus story from the biblical tradition, and through that story the God of life and liberation met the slaves' immediate needs. The exodus of the Israelites from the dominion of Pharaoh has existential relevancy for the African-American community. The story is an oasis of hope amid deserts of hopelessness.⁶¹

Through this strategy Christian education in the African American community can help persons engage in socio-political analysis. That is, their situation within society can be demystified and understood in ways that can lead to meaningful change. In addition, persons can see and explore "the relationship between individual problems and public life. The aim of the exodus strategy includes the support and/or development of public policies and

⁶⁰Ibid., 38.

⁶¹Ibid., 40.

strategies that ensure a just and equitable society.”⁶² It is this connection between faith and public life which is emphasized in this strategy. Like Paulo Freire’s strategy of *conscientization*, this strategy is aimed at enabling and empowering persons so that they might become agents in their own liberation, and not merely victims of external subjugation.

The exodus strategy of education is concerned with educating disciples of Christ for social responsibility. This strategy views the social responsibility of Christian education as inseparable from personal responsibility.⁶³

In summary, these four strategies, the story strategy, the exile strategy, the sanctuary strategy, and the exodus strategy form the major pillars of Crockett’s model of Christian education for the African American church. They also point to the need to include a focus on the aims of society and human destiny. We need to continually ask where are we going and what are we striving for?

Conclusion

Each of the models discussed above have major strengths. Shockley’s model stresses the need for a solid conceptual and theoretical base for doing Christian education for the African American church. He provides this with his emphasis on the importance of the theology of James Cone, the educational theory of Paulo Freire, and the ecclesiology of Gayraud Wilmore. In Moseley’s discussion of the challenges of ministry with and among African American youth, he stresses the need to promote the intergenerational transmission of faith within the African American community, and to promote the intercultural sharing of

⁶²Ibid., 41.

⁶³Ibid., 50.

faith with other communities. In this way, he suggests, Christian education can be an effective tool in combating the nihilism which confronts African American youth. Wimberly's model of Christian education emphasizes that the linking of our stories with those of the Bible and the stories of other persons can be an effective means of helping people to cope with life's circumstances. The strength of the model is its cultural sensitivity. Crockett's model stresses the importance of scripture as a starting point for Christian education in the African American community. Crockett's model focuses on the role of the Bible both as a source of validation and critique of the stories of the African American community.

All of these models address real and urgent needs within the African American community. However, the strengths of these models need to be brought together so that the problems that confront the African American community can be addressed on several fronts at once. By paying attention to both their strengths and their weaknesses the groundwork can be laid for the construction of a more comprehensive model of Christian education in the Black Church. Through the examination of the contributing sources of African traditional religion, slave religion and the Bible as seen through the eyes of African American Christians, I will propose, in Chapter 5, a model of Indigenous Black Religious Education (IBRE) which will incorporate the strengths of these sources and serve as an additional weapon in the arsenal against the powers of destruction which threaten the African American community.

CHAPTER 2

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Introduction

This chapter explores African traditional religion/society in relationship to its inherent educational practices. Here the goal and purpose of education is the establishment of the identity of the person in relation to his/her own community and in relation to God and the created order. Further, education is also focused on the preservation of the community, its traditions and values. The means by which this education is accomplished is through intergenerational storytelling, rituals, and the modeling of desired behavior. This education is intergenerational, through it the culture, history, and religion of the group is passed down. The result of the educational process is the holistic formation of persons in the context of their community.

African traditional religion is the earliest of the three formative factors that influenced the structure, mission and scope of the independent Black Church in the United States. Opinions vary on the issue of whether we should speak of African religion or religions. That discussion, while intriguing and legitimate, goes beyond the scope of the present study. Within the confines of this study however, when referring to African religion, all references will be singular. Briefly, African religion in this study draws on what I perceive as common threads that permeate the sacred cosmos and world view of Africans, and though practices

and rituals vary from one society to another, I contend commonalities do exist.

Centrality of Relationships and the Formation of Identity

There are hierarchically perceived elements that make up the universe or sacred cosmos in African religion. The sacred cosmos of Africans is a composite of the divine, spirits, humanity, animate and inanimate entities. At the top of the hierarchy of the universe is God.¹ An analysis of the interaction between the elements of the African sacred cosmos yields what Evan Zuesse terms the “deep structure” of African traditional religion.²

Uncovering the deep structure of any system requires that one consider the interaction and interdependence between elements that indeed form a unified whole. By looking at the elements of the African sacred cosmos, it becomes apparent that the identity of each element is subsumed, yet realized in God, which allows Archbishop Desmond Tutu to pronounce that “the African world view rejects the popular dichotomies between the sacred and the secular, the material and the spiritual. All life is religious, all life is sacred, all life is of a piece.”³ To talk of the deep structure of African religion is to explore existential meanings in the lived reality of people to ascertain how they make sense of and understand their world with all its ambiguity and mystery.

¹Laurenti Magesa, African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 39.

²Evan M. Zuesse, “Perseverance and Transmutation in African Traditional Religions,” in African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 170.

³Desmond Tutu, ed., An African Prayer Book (New York: Doubleday, 1995), xvi.

In the following pages I explore African religion in an attempt to uncover its deep structure, and its emergence as a dynamic model of identity that would be embraced and emulated by its descendants in the diaspora, specifically, the Black Church in the United States. In the explication of the deep structure inherent in African religion, I remain cognizant that concepts manifest themselves differently in the multiplicity of what are African cultural practices and rituals.

To expose the true depth of African religion we must delve into its innards to unravel its intricacies. Earlier I advanced a position on the singularity of African religion. Based on that position, I offer minimally two presuppositions for consideration when examining the structure of African religion: the centrality of relationship, and a belief in the potentiality for disequilibrium in the sacred cosmos. As I will show, both of these content areas provide critical resources for the development of an effective model of culturally relevant intergenerational Christian education for the African American church.

God and the Created Order

At first glance African religion may appear polytheistic with adherents relying on a pantheon of gods. However, upon close inspection the sacred cosmos of African religion is hierarchically ordered with “God the creator, at the top and under Him a number of super human beings such as divinities and nature spirits.”⁴ Known by many names, described in many roles and functions throughout Africa, there is a belief in the existence of the Supreme

⁴David Westerlund, “Insiders and Outsiders in the Study of African Religion’s: Notes on Some Problems of Theory and Method,” in African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 17.

Creator (God), who created and sustains all of life.⁵ Therefore, each element of the African sacred cosmos is believed to contain an indelible imprint of the Divine (God), placing them in an intimate relationship with God. Laurenti Magesa makes the point, declaring that “created reality, including humanity, exists on account of the will of God . . . through the act of creation, God is related in an unbreakable way to the entire universe.”⁶ Awolalu continues the discourse by stating that the supreme deity

is believed to be responsible for the creation and maintenance of heaven and earth, man and woman, and who also has brought into being divinities and spirits who are believed to be his functionaries in the theocratic world as well as intermediaries between mankind and the self-existent Being.⁷

Finally, according to Mbiti,

a number of societies consider God to be omniscient, that is, to know all things, to be simultaneously everywhere (i.e. omnipresent), and to be almighty (omnipotent). These are essential aspects of His being, they are part of His unique nature and no other being can be described in the same terms . . . [this] distinguish[es] God from His creation and make Him not only the genesis but also the sustainer of all things.⁸

Because God is understood as the originator and sustainer of the created order, God is consequently involved in the day-to-day lived realities of people, past, present and those yet to be born. God’s nature is perceived as good, pure, just, honorable, life sustaining and

⁵John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, 1970), 37.

⁶Magesa, 285.

⁷O. Ososade Awolalu, Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites (London: Longman Group, 1979), 3.

⁸Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 39.

loving.⁹

In the sacred cosmos of African religion, Mbiti describes the existence of two broad categories of spirits.¹⁰ The first category of spirits (intermediaries or divinities) are those created by God to act as functionaries between God and man, visible in natural phenomena (weather, harvest, health and healing, etc.). The second category is human spirits. These spirits are of two sorts, both of which are deceased. The first of the deceased human spirits are people who were improperly initiated or buried, or those who have passed from the memory of the living. These spirits possess a pernicious nature, capable of inflicting harm and are frequently the mediums of witchcraft. Finally, the *living-dead* are the spirits of ancestors.¹¹ Ancestors remain active members of the family, clan or community as long as a living person remembers them. Ancestors intervene in the lives of the clan/kin to stave off calamity, or their actions may serve as a call to *remember* the ancestors or past ancestral ways. Tutu describes ancestors as an “ever present cloud of witnesses surrounding the living and the yet to be born.”¹² Ancestors may become intermediaries, linking their kin to God and vice-versa.

The above observations suggest that an effective model of intergenerational Christian education for the African American church should include a component in which the ancestors

⁹For further discussion on the nature of God, see Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 39-49; and Magesa, 40-41.

¹⁰Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 97-118.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Tutu, An African Prayer Book, xvii.

are studied, revered and emulated. The stories of past generations can be a source of knowledge and inspiration for persons, especially youth, caught up in the storm of nihilism and despair.

Role of Intermediaries

Intermediaries or divinities do not exist separate from God nor are they equal to or competitors with God. To the contrary, intermediaries serve as ministering spirits between God and humanity. Zuesse speaks of the intermediaries as “refractions” of God,¹³ meaning that because of the grandness of God, it is necessary to obscure or distort God’s image through other mediums (i.e., divinities/intermediaries). Evans-Pritchard describes this refractive phenomenon as the paradox of God’s closeness to humanity and God’s separation from humanity.¹⁴

Although in African religion God is believed to be omnipresent, concerned about and directly involved with humanity and the created order, it is also held that an act of God’s benevolence is his remoteness and a withdrawal or veiling of God’s overwhelming power through intermediaries. Intermediaries temper the awesome presence and power of God. Mbiti asserts that

by using intermediaries, [people] feel that someone speaks on their behalf, taking their message to God. In some places, the departed are regarded as intermediaries because it is felt that they speak both the language of the invisible world and the language of human beings . . .
.....
in some ways they form a link in the chain of contact between their

¹³Zuesse, 174.

¹⁴E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Nuer Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 8-10.

living family members and the invisible God. People also feel that they are approaching God through someone who is known to them, who is part of them and shares the concerns and needs of the people.

Although African people use these intermediaries in performing some of their acts of worship, they do not worship the intermediaries themselves as such. They simply use them as helpers or assistants. By speaking through intermediaries they feel that they show more respect, esteem, honor and courtesy towards God, who must be approached with reverence and humility.

Thus, even though people are free to approach God directly, and often do so, they also feel the need for a bridge between them and their Creator. The intermediaries are not intended to cut God off from the people. They are windows and channels through which people may come closer to God. For some of the minor needs of life, people may find it more fitting not to trouble God, but prefer to address themselves only to the intermediaries.¹⁵

In African traditional religion intermediaries provide a means by which persons may approach a God who is beyond all gods. In the experience of African Americans who feel distant from God, the use of intermediate persons and events in the educational setting may prove an important and effective way to encourage an approach to the Divine Reality.

African Religion and Interpersonal Relationships

African religion views the world as a magnified projection of the original order of creation, with all things (God and the created order, including human beings) intimately interrelated.

The distinctive feature of traditional African religion lies in its being a way of life, and the purpose of religion is to order our relationship with our fellow-men and with our environment, both spiritual and

¹⁵John S. Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 2^d ed. (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991), 68-69.

physical. At the root of it is a quest for harmony between man, the spirit world, nature and society.¹⁶

Humanity's place and role in the created order is therefore of primary import because humans serve as moral agents in the created order sustaining the work of God on earth. Opoku is explicit in stating that the primary function of African religion is relational harmony with and between humans, their environment, the spirit world, nature and society. He stresses the point that harmony is sought in the material and spiritual realms, but how is harmony achieved and how is the created order perceived by Africans? To answer this question let us examine the African concept of human agency.

According to the African notion of humanism, the created order, particularly human beings, are viewed as valuable, deserving of the *good life*. Kwame Gyekye explains humanism in the Akan world view as a "doctrine that sees human needs, interests, and dignity as fundamental."¹⁷ Valuing human beings is not separate from the supernatural, to the contrary, "the relationship between the human and the divine; the heavenly and earthly spheres, is one of interdependence [and interconnectedness]."¹⁸ Practically speaking however, one cannot be valued in isolation which is why in the African world view, community is an integral and necessary part of one's existence.

Communitarianism is emphasized throughout Africa as demonstrated by the following

¹⁶Kofi Asare Opoku, West African Traditional Religion (Accra: FEP International Private, 1978), 13.

¹⁷Kwame Gyekye, An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 143.

¹⁸Marimba Ani, Let the Circle Be Unbroken: The Implication of African Spirituality in the Diaspora (New York: Nkonimfo Publications, 1980), 7.

proverbs and observations:.

Life is when you are together, alone you are an animal.
~ Malawi Proverb ~¹⁹

Seek the good of the community and you seek your own good.
Seek your own good and you seek your own destruction.
~ Akan Proverb ~²⁰

A person is a person through others' - one's humanity is interwoven with that of others.²¹

I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.²²

Humanity in Africa is basically family, basically community, with a strong emphasis on the traditional religion and its symbiotic union with ancestors and spiritual entities in the metaphysical world.²³

To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community.²⁴

African traditional social ethics were communal, not individualist. .
. . No man lived unto himself . . . what one man did affected,

¹⁹Opoku, 92.

²⁰Gyekye, 20.

²¹Desmond Tutu, Crying in the Wilderness (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), 119.

²²Mbiti, African Religion and Philosophy, 141.

²³Gerhardus Cornelis Oosthuizen. "The Place of Traditional Religion in Contemporary South Africa," in African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 41.

²⁴Mbiti, African Religion and Philosophy, 3.

directly or indirectly, other members of his society or community.²⁵

Without community you cannot be yourself.²⁶

While the ideal of community is primary in the African world view, it must be noted that community is not achieved at the expense or loss of individuality. In African thought, there is no competition between the individual and community. Human beings and their personhood are at the center of the created order and their well being and quality of life is of supreme import. However, there is an inherent understanding in African thought that the individual cannot flourish in isolation, that indeed community sustains and nurtures the individual.

An African learns who s/he is by participating in the shared life of the community. In this process the *good-life* is achieved by a person because that person seeks what is good for him/her while simultaneously striving for the common good of his/her society. To strive for the common good of society, a person must commit and be loyal to a shared way of life which includes common rules, values, obligations and understandings. "Common good literally and seriously means a good (food, shelter, clothing, good health, etc.) that is common to individual human beings."²⁷ Community is thus created in context, specifically a cultural context made possible through practices and traditions embraced by a collective.

²⁵Friday M. Mbon, "African Traditional Socio-Religious Ethics and National Development: The Nigerian Case," in African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 102.

²⁶Malidoma Patrice Some, Ritual: Power, Healing and Community (Portland: Swan Raven and Co., 1993), 67.

²⁷Gyekye, 45.

The importance of community in African traditional thought suggests that any effective model of intergenerational Christian education should have a significant emphasis on the role of the community. The community in African thought is the context for education and the passing on of traditions and customs. For African Americans whose links to Africa are often called into question, this emphasis can strengthen the sense of identity

Family and Kinship

The family and kinship are the core of African society and includes children, their parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters, and any children belonging to either of these categories of relations. Kinship is established through bloodlines and marriages, and exerts control over social relationships and taboos of a given society.

There is a mystical dimension to the family because it is composed of the living and the dead, with each performing specific roles that ensure the maintenance of the family and larger society. Among the living family members, elders serve as heads of families and are accorded great respect for their wisdom and relation with and nearness to the ancestors. It is the responsibility of heads of families to perform ancestral rites and sacrifices. Ancestral rites and sacrifices acknowledge and encourage the continuing presence and usefulness of the ancestors. Because the ancestors, now spirits, are closer to God, it is believed that s/he serves as an influential intermediaries. Kofi Asare Opoku provides a synopsis of ancestral beliefs from a West African perspective.

- (1) They indicate a strong belief in the continuation of life after death and that the dead continue to live and remain members of their families, clans and societies. Thus, human relationship cannot be broken, for not even death can cut off relations with one's relatives.

- (2) They also show that obligation, the basis of African society, is unending; for it continues after death, through time. The dead are expected to protect and guard the living, and as it is believed that death increases one's powers, the dead are able to offer more help or assistance.
- (3) The ancestral beliefs also give concrete expression to the African idea of community. For them, to be a human being is to belong to a community and to do so is to participate in the rituals, ceremonies and other activities of the community. The ancestors form the supernatural part of the human community in the world. Hence, this unseen part of the community is never left out in any communal activity and their participation is always sought. However, those who had bad deaths and those who, for various reasons, are not regarded as members of the revered group of ancestors, are outside the community.
- (4) The beliefs also bear clear evidence of the firm acceptance of the return of the dead. Reincarnation is therefore an accepted fact.
- (5) Lastly, the ancestral beliefs act as a form of social control by which the conduct of individuals is regulated. The constant reminder of the good deeds of the ancestors act as a spur to good conduct on the part of the living; and the belief that the dead can punish those who violate traditionally sanctioned mores acts as a deterrent. Ancestral beliefs, therefore, represent a powerful source of moral sanction for they affirm the values upon which society is based.²⁸

The familial relationship goes beyond that of a social unit, serving as cultus, meaning religious veneration is integral to its existence. Because of its cultic nature, and through ancestor veneration, the familial line is traced from the living, through ancestors, directly to God who is considered the First Grand Ancestor. God then becomes

an integral part of society. He is also call Grandfather, a title which is vested with the highest attributes of wisdom, grace and justice. As the First Grand Ancestor he has laid down the most exemplary path for succeeding generations to follow. All those who may be accorded the status of ancestors stand in line with Him, as do kings and chiefs and heads of the various lineages, for they all form the hierarchical

²⁸Opoku, 38-39.

structure at the top of which is the First Grand Ancestor.²⁹

In African traditional societies the family, both nuclear and extended are the first teachers of the child. Through interaction with the family, the clan, and the village, children learn who they are and the responsibilities that come with claiming that identity. Intergenerational Christian education within the African American community must focus on and strengthen the role of the family, whatever its form, in the education of youth and the continuing education of all of its members.

The Role of Nature

Nature plays an integral role in the created order. When speaking of nature in the sacred cosmos of African religion, we are concerning ourselves with natural phenomenon, biological life that is not human (to include plant and animal life) and non-biological entities (rocks, minerals, etc.). Because every element of the sacred cosmos carries within it an imprint of the Divine, these *beings* in African thought, are believed to possess a spirit or vital force.

The totemic system is an extension of kinship and provides a means whereby human beings are intimately connected to plants, animals and non-living objects. Salomon Reinach provides insight into understanding the significance of totems by outlining twelve points that undergird the African totemic system, they are:

- (1) Certain animals must not be killed or eaten.
- (2) A [totemic] animal that dies by accident is mourned and buried like a member of the tribe.

²⁹Ibid.

- (3) The prohibition of eating [a totemic animal] may refer only to a certain part of the animal.
- (4) [A totemic] animal killed for food, or safety, is asked for forgiveness, with various excusing evasions.
- (5) A taboo [or totemic] animal sacrificed for ritual is mourned.
- (6) For special religious ceremonies the skins of animals are worn, generally of the totem animals.
- (7) Tribes and individuals take the names of totem animals.
- (8) Many tribes take animal symbols as coats of arms, and have body tatoos.
- (9) Totem animals protect members of its clan.
- (10) Totem animals warn members of its clan.
- (11) Totem animals foretell the future of members and the entire clan.
- (12) The members of a totem clan believe they are connected with the totem animal by a common origin.³⁰

Through the totemic system, clan identity and behavior is formed.

The role of nature within most Protestant Christian thought has not been emphasized. However, given the holistic character of African traditional thought an understanding that humans are profoundly affected by their environment, both natural and socio-political, should be an important component of a model of intergenerational Christian education in the African American church. By rekindling the connectedness of human beings, through Christian education, to the entire created order, corrective measures that have the capacity to preserve

³⁰Salomon Reinach, Cults, Myths, and Religions (London: D. Nutt, 1912, 11f.), cited in Geoffrey Parrinder, West African Religion: Illustrated from the Beliefs and Practices of the Yoruba, Ewe, Akan, and Kindred Peoples, (London: Epworth Press, 1949), 187-94.

life, human and environmental, will be reinstated. Food cooperatives, wildlife preserves and respect for human life constitute a small sampling of the presence of God in all creation, all of which can be mediated through an intentional religious education process.

Ritual and Rites of Passage

One moves between personhood and community through the ritual process. The ritual process is a system of words, symbols and actions that convey information that contain beliefs, values, norms, etc., that are important within a culture.³¹ The ritual process accompanies a person throughout life, however, it is through initiation, a rite of passage, that one enjoins the self to the community proper. According to van Gennep, “all rites of passage are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen, signifying ‘threshold’), and aggregation.”³² In the first phase, separation, a person is removed or exiled from a previously held position, such as childhood, within a social structure. At the point of separation the person enters the second phase known as liminality where commonalities exist only among those who occupy liminal space with the initiate. All other members of the respective society are estranged from the initiates either because they have not reached the same stage in life or because they have completed this particular phase. Liminality, as stated earlier, represents a threshold or an in between place. In the case of initiation, where one moves from childhood to adulthood, the initiate in liminal space is no longer a child but is not yet an adult. The

³¹For discussions on the role and function of ritual, see Victor Turner, The Drum of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) 1-27; and Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 131-40.

³²Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1909), cited in Victor Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, 94-97.

process of becoming an adult or full member of the community requires that one learns a particular set of knowledge. It is the intent of the rite of passage that initiates learn that s/he carries within the self, the all (community) and that only through separation and liminality can that reflective discovery take place.³³ Through training, guidance and reflection, the initiates learn adult, familial, and societal roles and responsibilities. This liminal period prepares the initiate to enter the third phase, reincorporation or re-aggregation. Upon reincorporation into society the person is no longer an initiate but an adult with full membership in the community, joining and identifying with generations, past, present and those yet to come. One's decision not to participate or failure in the initiation rite brings shame to the individual and his/her family, and prohibits a person from enjoying full participation and membership in the larger society.

Rituals are opportunities to communicate in verbal and non-verbal ways the kind of world in which we live. They also provide a means by which persons are prepared for the shifting challenges and responsibilities of life. Ritual moments in African American life should be essential teaching and learning opportunities in a model of intergenerational Christian education for the African American church.

Disequilibrium in the Sacred Cosmos

Harmony is of paramount concern to the African. To this end, all relationships are constructed and maintained in ways that promote harmony between God and the created order including human beings. Social conflict, disharmony between any segment of the

³³Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 385-86.

created order, produces disequilibrium or evil in the sacred cosmos. Mechal Sobel explains that in the West African view,

God is good, and there was once an ideal state. [For them], evil is caused by some spirit or some person having violated the proper social order, either through forgetfulness or deliberated act. In either case, the individual act has strong communal repercussions, as the individual exists only as a member of a large and intrinsically interrelated social group. The principle of good is whatever makes for community welfare, while evil is the reverse.³⁴

Evil is most readily visible in witchcraft. While mediumship or spirit possession is viewed as a unifying activity between human beings and the living-dead and spirits, witchcraft “is perceived by African religion to be the greatest wrong or destructiveness on earth, of which all other wrongs are but variations, emanations, or manifestations.”³⁵ Magesa declares further that

witchcraft is the enemy of life, [disruptive to the] harmony, order, good neighborliness or good company, cooperation and sharing, propriety and equitableness, honesty and transparency-all of which constitute signs of how human and created order should be.³⁶

In African thought, every human being has the potential to be a witch. “Anybody who does that which is contrary to the acceptable standard of society, particularly where the person involved does that which is harmful to the good of the society, will be dubbed a

³⁴Mechal Sobel, Trabelin’ On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), 18.

³⁵Ibid., 186.

³⁶Magesa, 68.

witch.”³⁷ The insidiousness of witchcraft rests in its individualistic rather than communal nature. Further, activities associated with witchcraft are understood as antithetical to God, ethical principles, and life itself.

Women are viewed as the primary functionaries in witchcraft. In the role of medium, a woman is considered an appropriate vehicle because it is her duty to be concerned with the welfare of others and the act of mediumship has as its goal unity and harmony. Conversely, women are labeled as possessors of mystical powers (i.e., witches) as an antithesis to the oppression of men, and by African society at large if they do not meet accepted images/patterns of self sacrifice. For instance, women who choose not to live traditional lives that include raising families, or those who insist on high levels of independence may be viewed as self-aggrandizing, negligent of her responsibility to others, particularly the males in her family.³⁸ Often, a high degree of education is blamed for this, not realizing or embracing the notion that self actualization occurs for women.

Traditional Healing

In African traditional religion, the religious permeates all of life. There is no rigid distinction between the secular and the sacred. Therefore, when illness, madness and/or other difficult personal circumstances occur, it is understood that the natural order is askew. Since the African concept of the universe includes the divine, ancestors, spirits, human beings, animate and inanimate entities, when and where there are imbalances between the

³⁷Awolalu, 87.

³⁸Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 32, 120-23.

metaphysical world, human beings and the created order, chaos ensues. Some understand personal calamity, including illness, as a byproduct of sin. Because of one's co-dependence on others, affliction can manifest itself in someone else because of their closeness to the offender (sinner).

The traditional healer or medicine doctor is conscious of the social structure of the patient. Because they (patient and healer/doctor) share communal space, the healer is aware of precipitating circumstances that plague the afflicted patient. Often ancestors are conferred with when seeking to diagnose and/or cure an individual. The patient generally is not treated individually. Rather, the healing process involves close relations, and may also include the larger community. Disease is not thought of as merely a physical or mental dysfunction but as a religious matter. As such, the healer serves in a priestly role. Some afflictions occur because prescribed rituals have not been performed. Some approaches taken by African healers to restore a person/family/community to wholeness include prayer, sacrifices and offering, protective and curative medicines, shame and guilt, ordeals and punishment, therapeutic dances and reconciliation rituals.

Because there is a holistic approach to the healing process in African traditional religion, the medicine doctor must be knowledgeable about the medicinal value inherent in a wide range of herbs and natural elements. The knowledge of the medicinal uses of herbs and natural elements is lodged in the memory of African Americans, particularly elders from the southern region of the United States. Historically, the white controlled medical profession, abused blacks, experimenting with their health rather than making genuine attempts to heal presenting ailments. Testing new gynecological procedures, and the Tuskegee (syphilis)

Experiment are but two examples of the inhumane medical treatment blacks have encountered. Aside from being holistic, *home remedies* used by blacks are natural, cost effective and were/are more readily available than standard medical care. Christian education in this way can again highlight the presence of God through natural healing with all of creation in harmony, aiding one another. Listed below are two examples of home remedies passed down through generations of black families.

Cure for Tonsilitis

- (1) Find a red clay brick that does not have holes.
- (2) Break the brick in half.
- (3) Remove chunks of clay from the middle of the brick and place the chunks in a clean cloth.
- (4) Beat the chunks into a fine powder.
- (5) Place the powdered clay and a cup of milk in a saucepan.
- (6) Bring the mixture to a boil.
- (7) Strain the mixture into a glass or cup.
- (8) Allow the mixture to cool til it is lukewarm.
- (9) Gargle.

This regime removes infection from the tonsils.

Shrinking Hemorrhoids

To shrink hemorrhoids, make a suppository using a white potato and insert it into the rectum making sure its large enough to retract.³⁹

³⁹Home remedies provided by Mrs. M. Davis Kenner of Spring Ridge, South Carolina.

Leadership

Tribal leaders serve as representatives on behalf of their tribe before their ancestors, effectuating a link between the living and the dead. In this capacity, leaders serve in both political and religious capacities. While there are several categories of leaders in African societies, I will briefly introduce the role and function of the following: chiefs/kings/queens, priests, mediums, diviners and medicine doctors/herbalists.

Not all African societies are governed by chiefs, kings or queens. However, when these rulers are present in a society, their personage signifies not only political authority but mystical and religious authority as well. Rulers in African societies are accepted and embraced as divine incarnations of God, serving in God's stead on earth. As such, African rulers are shrouded in mystery and treated with the utmost respect. African rulers/leaders are expected by God and human beings to administer justice equitably, practice moral integrity, engage in sanctioned cultic practices and protect the tribe/society against outside agitators. Because of the high esteem in which leaders are held in African societies, they preside over civil and religious ceremonies and when natural catastrophes occur it is believed that the relationship between the leader and God has been breached, making it necessary to appease God through rituals and sacrifice(s). The fabric of an African society is held together in the person of the ruler.⁴⁰

Priests

Priests are the religious leaders in African societies, set apart for the service of a particular divinity, meaning they are the primary persons who offer sacrifices to that divinity. Because

⁴⁰Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 238-44.

of the power and popularity of priests in African societies, they are generally limited to religious functions in societies where there is a chief, king or queen. Many priests undergo intensive training under the tutelage of an older priest or priestess and priesthood is bestowed upon an individual in several ways including familial succession, as a response to a call by a specific divinity, or by choosing to be trained as a priest. Aside from offering ritual sacrifices, priests spend time “propitiating the god and finding out his will for inquirers, in divining, settling disputes, healing the sick and meditation.”⁴¹

Mediums

“The main duty of mediums is to link human beings with the living-dead and the spirits”⁴² Mediumship is achieved through spirit possession, meaning the spirit or ego of an individual is physically possessed by a specific spirit. A medium conveys a message to a designated person or group while in a trance-like state (spirit possession). The message relayed from a specific spirit to a person or group through a medium may cover any aspect of life because of the interconnectedness of the visible and invisible spheres. It is noteworthy to emphasize that while messages conveyed by the medium may be specifically addressed to an individual, affecting areas such as misfortunes that occur in life (health, theft, etc.), “the spirit may also enumerate specific moral irregularities in the community which must be rectified (such as incest)”⁴³ The work of mediums is perceived as good, acts that create or

⁴¹Parrinder, 87.

⁴²Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 224.

⁴³Michael Gelfand, “The Mhondoro Cult of the Shona-speaking People of Southern Rhodesia,” in African Systems of Thought, eds. Meyer Forest and Germaine Dieterlen (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 346.

re-establish harmony between the created order. Therefore, human beings are expected to obey the instructions/information relayed by mediums or if further instruction is necessary, they are to seek guidance from people who interpret messages conveyed by mediums (i.e., diviners).

The roles and functions of mediums vary in African societies. In some instances they are independent from other prominent members of the tribe/clan such as the medicine-doctor, diviner, herbalist, chief, etc. In other instances, the medium may serve in a dualistic role. Similarly, training or the lack thereof for mediums varies from one African society to the next. In some cases, a person may be predisposed to mediumship based on his/her receptivity for mediumship, or the willingness of a spirit to enter into a specific person. Conversely, in many African societies, mediums undergo intensive training. According to Mbiti,

the main aim of the training is to create new personalities, the candidates learn a new language, which they will later use in the transaction of their duties as mediums, and in greeting other mediums They also learn rules of eating, drinking and dressing as mediums, the songs, prayers and blessings of their cult, dances and exercised to produce the state of possession (or mediumship). . . . When the training is over, they are given final instructions by the chief priest concerning their work and conduct, especially [a sort of moral codes that govern social relationships].⁴⁴

Diviners and Medicine Doctors

Diviners are not priests, because they are not responsible for performing ritualistic sacrifices. Diviners are not the same as mediums, their divining roles/duties are performed outside spirit trance/possession. However, their roles do overlap those of priest, diviner and

⁴⁴Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 229.

medicine doctor because they “seek to interpret the mysteries of life, to convey the messages of the gods, to give guidance in daily affairs, and settle disputes, to uncover the past and look into the future.”⁴⁵ Diviners understand human nature and through their knowledge of the occult and medicinal preparations, help to maintain equilibrium within the created order. Medicine doctors work closely with diviners to dispense the appropriate curative medicines and restore harmony through social relationships within the community. In the African American community, specifically the Black Church, some are believed to possess the spiritual gift of discernment, while others the gift of healing. In their respective communities, these persons are held in high esteem, revered, and feared. To some extent, *hoodoo* conjurers are accorded the same respect and they are also considered spiritual, working from a power different than that that emanates from God.

The Role, Function and Form of Education in Traditional Societies

The primary role of education in traditional African societies is to incorporate a person into her/his community and the belief system of that community. Therefore, the function of education is practical in its approach. This means that education is an act of empowerment that provide the necessary tools, skills and knowledge for flourishing in one’s environment.

When we consider the elements that constitute the form of education in traditional African societies, we cannot apply contemporary educational theories and curriculum designs because they are overwhelmingly individualistic in their focus and because they are designed primarily for school settings. In the pages that follow, the form of education in traditional African

⁴⁵Parrinder, 152.

societies will be explicated.

Africans are concerned with existing harmoniously with the sacred cosmos which includes the divine, spirits, ancestors, human beings, animate and inanimate entities. Harmony is achieved through relationship and relationships are formed in and through community. Therefore, every African must develop a strong sense of identity that fosters respect for and establishes a link between the self and elements of the African sacred cosmos. Additionally, Africans must learn life skills that usher them into full membership with their respective communities.

Ritual, frequently requiring sacrifice, is a major educational practice in traditional African societies. By definition, a ritual is an established ceremonial act, involving a series of exercises.⁴⁶ At the heart of ritual action is the transmutation of a literal act to a symbolic and transcendental action.⁴⁷ According to Malidoma Some, the role of a person

in ritual is to be human. [Humans] take the initiative to spark a process, knowing that its success is not in our hands but in the hands of the kind of forces we invoke into our lives. So the force field we create within a ritual is something coming from the spirit, not something coming from us. [Humans] are only instruments in this kind of interaction between dimensions, between realms.⁴⁸

Africans are engaged in the ritual process throughout their lives, beginning before a person is born and continuing after his/her physical demise. The ritual process produces an

⁴⁶Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, s. v. "ritual."

⁴⁷Evan M. Zuesse, Ritual Cosmos: The Sanctification of Life in African Religions (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979), 7.

⁴⁸Some, 50-51.

interaction between the elements of the African sacred cosmos and every aspect of human existence. A person comes to know his/her own identity by understanding the community and its moral and ethical systems. I will demonstrate the ritual process using three ritualistic moments in the life of an African. From birth to the afterlife as an ancestor, the formation of identity in relation to others evolve, and form an intricate system to become part of the sacred cosmos.

Fon Birth Rite

It is taboo to declare pregnancy in Fon (West African) society. However when the pregnancy is known, older female family members make an offering to the family gods. The gods are promised additional gifts and offerings if the baby is born healthy through a normal delivery. During the third month of pregnancy, the Ifa oracle is consulted to discern which foods and places should be avoided by the expectant mother. To ensure the protection of the baby and mother, at the time the oracle is consulted, the diviner is given gifts in exchange for a protective charm.⁴⁹

The process of identity formation is begins before the birth of a baby in African societies. Many societies make intercession to the ancestors before the birth of a child and at the time of the birth the child is *given* to or identified with a particular ancestor who becomes the *protector* of the infant throughout his/her life. This bond is consummated often in a naming ritual where the newborn is named after the protective ancestor. Often, when infant deaths occur, it is believed that the newborn has not ben properly enjoined to an ancestor. Finally, the personality and temperament of the newborn is expected to resemble that of the ancestor,

⁴⁹Parrinder, 108.

therefore, names are taken quite seriously in African culture.

Sande Association (female secret society)

Initiation Rites in Mende Society of West Africa

Initiation into the Sande may occur at any age, but must take place before puberty. Girls are invited to attend the Sande school by the head of the association. *Sokolo*, a piece of tobacco leaf, is sent to a girl as the official method of invitation. In order to enroll in the Sande school, fees must be paid in the form of money, food or cloth.

There are several membership tiers in the association and greater privileges are attained as each successive tier is mastered. It is not necessary for Mende girls to go beyond the first tier; however, if a girl rejects initiation, she is labeled small or *gboa* and is forbidden to engage in sex.

Before training officially begins, huts are erected for the new initiates within the Sande compound. Before entering the compound for the first time the girls are smeared with white clay, dressed in fine clothes and given new Sande names (birth names are no longer used).

Over time, the length of training, specifically seclusion, has been altered, nonetheless, the purpose is the same, it teaches girls accepted patterns of life, such as hard work, respect for elders, modesty in behavior, dancing, singing and crafts. The girls are gradually reincorporated into the broader society, leaving the compound initially in the company of others and eventually alone. The final ceremony involves the entire community and begins with a parade led by four Sande officials. The girls dance through the streets with their heads covered with mud, possessing knowledge previously unknown to them but knowledge now shared with generations of former initiates. The ritualistic washing off of the mud marks the

final transition from childhood to womanhood, where a new identity has been forged. After their heads have been cleansed of the mud, the women again march through town. If the woman was betrothed prior to beginning the initiation process, she is permitted to marry after spending three nights in the Sande house and another three in her mother's house.⁵⁰

Epulu general healing ritual

In agrarian societies such as the Epulu of West Africa, illness is viewed as an imbalance between the Divine, humanity and nature. To restore balance, the sick are bathed in vine juices so that they may be infused with the spirit of the forest. A curative paste is concocted, consisting of saliva and herbs, which are packed into slits in the skin. Customarily, the slits are made at the temples and on the cheeks of the sufferer. The slits heal into permanent welts, which are thought to make a person more attractive to others and to the forest. The former sufferer is now rejoined, body and spirit to the forest which in turn reconnects him/her to the divine.⁵¹

Conclusion

The educational practices present in the ritual of traditional African societies are repetition and modeling. Education in African societies is intergenerational, transmitted by and between family/kinship relations, community elders, leaders, and ancestors.

Intergenerational education may be defined as a learning experience that “gathers people from at least two and preferably three or more age groups or generations into a

⁵⁰Opoku, 116-18.

⁵¹Zuesse, 29-30.

teaching-learning process in which all members give and receive from the experience.”⁵²

In African societies the ritual process is an intergenerational learning event that connects the young to their elders, ancestors and God.

African traditional religion is a complex system, an intricately woven tapestry that insists on harmony with God and the created order through a belief in the interconnectedness and interaction with the elements of the sacred cosmos (divine, spirits, human beings, animate and inanimate beings). Harmony is maintained through relationship. Relationships are maintained through moral and ethical behavior that has been established by the First Grand Ancestor (God). God’s character exhibits wisdom, grace and justice, which are traits that are to be emulated by human beings as they interact with the created order and each other. God is worshiped through relationships therefore humans can only be as close to God as they are to the other elements of the created order. The order (harmony, morality and ethical behavior) and intricacies of African societies is a way of being that is transmitted from one generation to the next through intergenerational linkages that begin before the birth of a child and extends beyond an individual’s physical demise.

Tragically, harmony on the African continent was irreparably challenged by outsiders and insiders with the onset of slave trading. The sanctity of the African sacred cosmos was breached by the Atlantic slave trade and the crisis of the middle passage.

⁵²Charles R. Foster, “Intergenerational Religious Education” in *Changing patterns of Religious education*, ed. Marvin J. Taylor (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 282, cited in James W. White, *Intergenerational Religious Education*, (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1988), 19.

The middle passage is most commonly associated with “the voyage of the slave ship”⁵³ loaded with human cargo (Africans that had been sold into captivity by African conquerors as a result of war, or those kidnaped by slavers) headed for ports in North America, Europe, Portugal, etc., crossing the Atlantic Ocean. However, I would like to suggest that the middle passage includes the trek through the interior of Africa, beginning with the estrangement of Africans from their village, culminating at their final point of disembarkation. Through written accounts, we know that the acculturation process began for the now “enslaved” Africans long before reaching their final destination and that the “journey” was dehumanizing and tortuous. The trek through the interior of Africa and the ensuing voyage across the Atlantic, became “an introduction to the Euro-American state, for they were mini-states with their own polity, their own laws and government,”⁵⁴ all of which had as their goal the dehumanization of Africans for the sake of economic profit. Additionally, this trek signaled the beginning of the mis-education of Africans and their descendants.

While African bodies were attacked and removed from African soil, the Africans took a well established, ingrained world view to foreign lands. Although it was widely believed that spirits could not cross water, the memory of the spirits, lodged in the hearts and spirit of enslaved Africans provided the basis for a new construction of community and a means of survival in the harsh reality of slavery.

⁵³Sterling Stuckey, Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.

⁵⁴Vincent Harding, There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 10.

CHAPTER 3

THE SLAVE COMMUNITY/RELIGION

Introduction

This chapter examines slave community/religion in the United States in relation to its inherent educational practices. Here the goal and purpose of education is the survival of the identity of the person in relation to the fragmented manifestations of community among the slaves and in relation to the false identity laid upon slaves by the dominant society. Further, education is also focused on the creation of a new community out of the memories of an African past, the encounter with the rhetoric of freedom and nationalism, as well as an emphasis on human dignity. The means by which this education is accomplished is through the raising of the socio-political consciousness of the individual through both oral and written texts. This education is intergenerational, and in that context, the culture, history, and religion of the group adapted to novel situations. The result of the educational process is that persons and communities are *in-formed* by the challenges of new surroundings and life circumstances.

This educational dimension will be approached through an examination of the influence of slave religion on the formation of the Black Church. The key question is how did slave religion convey to its adherents strategies for survival under harsh and brutal circumstances? In order to address this question we will examine three areas within slave

religion; the centrality of a sense of community among the slaves, the relationship between religion and the socio-political order, and the religious response to injustice. We will conclude with an examination of the religious role and meaning of education within the slave community.

Community, Culture and Nationalism

The religion of African slaves was the second major formative influence on the development of the Black Church and its sense of its educational mission and ministry. This religion evolved from African traditional religious sensibilities and the challenges presented to African slaves by the emergent Protestant culture. This Protestant culture was the breeding ground for a nationalist spirit which found expression in the independence movement in the colonies and in subsequent secession battles during the first one hundred years of American history. This same culture, ironically, permitted the emergence of a kind of nationalism among the African slaves. This nationalism was, on the one hand, forged in common suffering and oppression. On the other hand, this nationalism was rooted in the common cultural values and sensibilities which survived the Middle Passage. Slave religion was part and parcel of the slave's affirmation of a common culture, the formation of a nationalist spirit, and the emergence of an identifiable slave community. The inherent sense of community in slave religion is a major part of what Evan Zuesse would call its *deep structure*. Sterling Stuckey notes that

the nationalism of the slave community was essentially African nationalism, consisting of values that bound slaves together and sustained them under brutal conditions of oppression. Their very effort to bridge ethnic differences and to form themselves into a single people to meet the challenge of a common foe proceeded from an impulse that was Pan-African—that grew out of a concern for all

Africans—as what was useful was appropriated from a multiplicity of African groups even as an effort was made to eliminate distinctions among them.¹

The strident nationalism described by Stuckey emphasizes the socio-political roots of community among enslaved Africans. Here, people are brought together by a common set of experiences as chattel slaves.

Mechal Sobel argues that a socio-political nationalism may have existed in the North where slaves had undergone a breaking in period in the Caribbean, whereas in the South, a more identifiable *cultural* nationalism may have developed.

The various colonial sections of North America were also populated by different combinations of peoples. Slaves coming to the Northern colonies were most often born in the West Indies In stark contrast, the South's slave population was primarily African-born and, as slavery grew, Africans were increasingly shipped directly to North America.²

Slave holders in the respective regions also held different opinions regarding the importance of ethnic homogeneity among the slave populations and its role in the emergence of a sense of peoplehood among the slaves. Southern planters were ultimately concerned that their slaves came from ethnic groups which were more adaptable to the conditions of plantation life and less likely to rebel. Northern slave holders seemed not to share this concern.

Most of the slave shiploads brought to the Americas were advertised as if they were homogeneous groups, with the ethnic origins of the slaves generally a distinct item of concern in the lower South We know that South Carolina and Georgia planters, as well as those on the islands, were very conscious of the origins of their slaves and had strong opinions about tribal differences and the supposed relative

¹Stuckey, ix.

²Sobel, 23.

value of the different groups In sharper contrast, Northern sales did not generally note tribal origins but most often simply defined blacks as 'Negros.'³

Slave holders in the South were concerned about managing slave life in a situation where they and their hirelings were severely outnumbered; however it was the protection of their economic interests that most concerned slave holders. Therefore, they looked first and foremost at the issue of social control as a means of assuring productivity among the slaves. During non-working hours slaves were often free to pursue the activities associated with maintaining their lives. Sobel concludes that "[t]he result of this arrangement was that spiritual space was left for blacks to forge the new neo-African world view."⁴

John W. Blassingame concurs that the concern with the ethnicity of the slaves grew out of the desire to protect economic interests. However, he is not convinced that choosing one particular ethnic group over another would diminish the possibility of insurrections among the slaves.

The ethnic origins of the first slaves are important primarily in relation to the extent to which native culture and economic organization prepared the African for one facet of plantation life, systematic labor. While the customary labor of certain peoples made it relatively easy for them to adapt to agricultural labor in the New World, it is not at all clear that there was a close relationship between docility and

³Ibid., 27-28.

⁴Ibid., 34.

rebelliousness among slaves and their ethnic origin.⁵

Blassingame argues that during the slave trade, African culture and European culture encountered one another while both were in the process of formation. He notes that this occurred during the Middle Passage and during the “seasoning” period which slaves experienced in the Carribean. Moreover, these cultures borrowed from one another. Because African cultural forms were not valued as *African* but only as they could be translated into European cultural forms, their survival among the slave population is all the more exceptional.

The most remarkable aspect of the whole process of enslavement is the extent to which the American-born slaves were able to retain their ancestors’ culture. While the continuation of the African slave trade in the nineteenth century to Latin America permitted slaves there to maintain, to a certain degree, the purity of African cultural forms, the discontinuation of the trade to [the] United States severely limited the contacts American slaves had with Africans and led to much adulteration of African cultural forms. Even so, and in spite of his disadvantages when compared with his Latin American counterpart, the American slave was able to retain many African cultural elements and an emotional contact with his motherland. This contact, however tenuous, enabled the slave to link European and African forms to create a distinctive culture, and to contribute to his master’s culture.⁶

Cultural anthropologists Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price advocate a more moderate nationalism, in their view ethnic homogeneity among African slaves presented a more formidable obstacle to the formation of a common culture.

⁵John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South, rev. and enl. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 6. This classic text, though dated, is still in many respects a standard by which subsequent studies of slavery in the United States are measured.

⁶Ibid., 47-48.

The concept of some kind of common West African heritage requires additional refinement, in our view If we define 'culture' as a body of beliefs and values, socially acquired and patterned, that serve . . . as guides of and for behavior, then the term cannot be applied without some distortion to the manifold endowments of those masses of enslaved individuals, separated from their respective political and domestic settings, who were transported, in more or less heterogeneous cargoes, to the New World.⁷

Though these authors argue that unity among Africans in the New World was not easily achieved, an African-American culture and community did indeed emerge.

From a transatlantic perspective, those deep-level cultural principles, assumptions, and understandings which were shared by the Africans in any New World colony—usually, an ethnically heterogeneous aggregate of individuals—would have been a limited though crucial resource [The] probable importance of such generalized principles notwithstanding, the Africans in any New World colony in fact became a *community* and began to share a *culture* only insofar as, and as fast as, they themselves created them.⁸

Eugene D. Genovese argues that the religious foundations of black nationalism among the slave community included a strong African component. This component which he refers to as a folk dynamic played a crucial role in the slave's ability to survive the devastating effects of slavery.

The folk dynamic in the historical development of Afro-American Christianity saved the slaves from the disaster that some historians erroneously think they suffered—that of being lost between a lost African culture and a forbidden European one. It enabled them to retain enough of Africa to help them create an appropriate form for

⁷Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, "The Birth of African-American Culture," in African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture, ed. Timothy E Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York: Routledge, 1997), 39-40.

⁸Ibid., 43-44.

the new content they were forging and to contribute to the mainstream of American national culture while shaping an autonomous identity.⁹

It is important to note that this identity affirmed the dignity and humanity of enslaved Africans. This meant that the identity of the slave was not determined by his/her social condition. Thus, Genovese asserts that “[b]lack religion had to be more than slave religion [embodying] a protonational identification”¹⁰

Survival was a daily concern for African slaves. They had to be concerned about the capricious behavior of their masters and overseers. They also had to be cognizant of the needs of their children and loved ones. Survival meant more than enduring the tortures of an evil institution. It meant overcoming that evil and living life as fully as possible. For people of African descent that can only be done in the context of a community which affirmed indigenous African values. As enslaved people it could only be done in the context of a community that shared an experiential history.

God and the Socio-Political Order

Slave religion has often been characterized as *otherworldly* or inwardly focused. That is, the language and tenor of slave worship, preaching, prayers and testimony often drew on imagery connected with the coming reward in heaven for those who were faithful, or the internal satisfaction of living a faithful life under the most difficult of circumstances. What has been overlooked in these analyses of slave religion is its intimate connection to the socio-political reality of the lives of the slaves. African traditional religion was characterized by its

⁹Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Random House, 1972), 280.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 281.

holistic approach to life. All dimensions of the lives of Africans were covered by their religion. There was no marked distinction between the spiritual and the material aspects of their existence. Slave religion retained the African religious sensibility but did so in a New World context where the socio-political and the religious dimensions of life were often in great tension and sometimes completely disconnected. Thus, the religion of slaves took a developmental course which took into account their new socio-political context. Eugene Genovese notes that

the religion of Afro-American slaves, like all religion, grew as a way of ordering the world and of providing a vantage point from which to judge it. Like all religion it laid down a basis for moral conduct and an explanation for the existence of evil and injustice. The religion of the slaves manifested many African 'traits' and exhibited greater continuity with African ideas than has generally been appreciated. But it reflected a different reality in a vastly different land and in the end emerged as something new.¹¹

This new religion of the slaves was an admixture of the remnants of African traditional religion and evangelical Protestant Christianity. The roots of Christianity in the political struggle of the people of Israel for freedom from bondage in Egypt and in the acknowledgment of and victory over sin and death as symbolized by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ meant that Christianity could not help but be political. Although this dimension of Christianity was grossly distorted by the context of conquest and the slave trade, Genovese notes that "African slaves eventually provided their own version of this interpretation of Christianity's political role."¹²

¹¹Genovese, 162.

¹²Ibid., 163.

This indigenous interpretation of the political role of Christianity stood in contrast to the socio-political order of slavery. Christianity sometimes calls for the submission of the individual to earthly powers and it sometimes calls for resistance to those powers. The major question is who is required to submit and who is permitted to resist. Again, Genovese observes that

if [Christianity] calls for political submission to the powers that be, it also calls for militant defense of the freedom of the spirit and the autonomy of the personality . . . Thus, no matter how obedient—how Uncle Tomish—Christianity made a slave, it also drove deep into his soul an awareness of the moral limits of submission, for it placed a master above his own master and thereby dissolved the moral and ideological ground on which the very principle of absolute lordship must rest. It was much more than malice that drove so many Southern masters to whip slaves for praying to God for this or that and to demand that they address all grievances and wishes to their earthly masters.¹³

As Genovese notes, the slave was often punished for praying to God rather than to his/her master. This simply reinforced the view of the universe in which God was no longer supreme but that place was usurped by the slave master. B.A. Botkin, records this testimony of a former slave.

Sometimes [the slaves] tried to run away. They had dogs to trail ‘em with, so they always cotched ‘em, and then the whipping boss beat ‘em most to death. It was awful to hear ‘em hollering and begging for mercy. If they hollered, ‘Lord, have mercy!’ Marse Jim didn’t hear ‘em, but if they cried, ‘Marse Jim, have mercy!’ then he made ‘em stop the beating . . . He say, ‘The Lord rule Heaven, but Jim Smith rule the earth.’¹⁴

¹³Ibid., 165.

¹⁴B. A. Botkin, ed., Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 163.

It was precisely this separation of the dominions of heaven and earth which the slaves refused to accept. Though the language of their religion may have disguised it, their African religious sensibility affirmed that the socio-political order of this world also belonged to God.

Christ, Heroes and Saints

As African slaves began to adapt themselves to their new and strange environment they were compelled to re-conceptualize their notion of the ways that God was made manifest in their lives. In traditional African religion the supreme being was accompanied by intermediaries; divine beings charged with assisting the supreme God is ruling the universe. Most African slaves in the United States who became Christians, were Protestant. Thus, the Christianity to which they were exposed did not employ intermediaries such as saints within Roman Catholicism. In this new context the role of intermediaries was taken by an assortment of heroes, legendary and otherwise, martyrs, and most importantly the figure of Jesus Christ.

African slaves brought with them from the shores of Africa a rich repository of stories and tales of heroic figures. Some of them were comic heroes such as the tales of the hare, which in slavery became the Brer Rabbit tales recorded by Joel Chandler. In these stories the wit and wisdom of a smaller creature continually frustrates the power of the larger creature. Other heroes were more dramatic in their presentation. High John the Conquer is perhaps the most well known of these heroes. High John was straight from Africa, immortal, and always available to hear the travails of the slaves. His intervention was often spoken of in mysterious terms. The heroes and heroines of the slaves were not all legendary. Frederick Douglass, the escaped slave and abolitionist orator and Harriet Tubman, who led hundreds

of slaves from bondage to freedom through the Underground Railroad were also part of the heroic tradition. However, the characteristics which made all of these persons heroes were found in biblical figures and especially in Jesus Christ. In Jesus, the slave found one who had overcome the power of death and bondage to sin. Enslaved Africans and their descendants understood slavery as sin, against the will of God. They found one to whom they could appeal and who would intervene on their behalf. They found one who spoke for them when they could not speak for themselves and one who was even presently leading them from slavery to freedom. Even in a new and strange world, the slaves found intermediaries who assisted in carrying out the will of God. The major written text which the slaves employed in their learning was the Bible, and it will be address in a later chapter. Oral stories were also educational texts through which the slave clung, because they were similar to the that of their native culture.

Christian slaves depended upon God as the ultimate guide and protector of their existence. However, this dependence did not mean that the slaves themselves took no responsibility for their own fate. The dependence which the slaves had upon God did not weaken their resolve but strengthened it. God's unquestioned claim upon their lives required them to live their lives fully as God's creations. They belonged to God.

This understanding also meant that they were God's people, not only as individuals, but also as a group. God's choice of them, in spite of their condition bound them together, reinforcing their understanding of themselves as a nation. They understood themselves as persons only in the context of understanding themselves as a community brought into being by God.

Family and Kinship

From the beginning of slavery in the United States until the 1960s and beyond, arguments that the black family was flawed, inferior, or pathological found a hearing in the dominant society. However, contrary to these popular notions, the black family was not simply a pathological imitation of the European family unit. Rather, the black family both in slavery and freedom functioned to sustain people in pathological circumstances. The family unit assisted person survive the horrors of slavery and oppression. In addition, the family provided an important framework in which children were nurtured, protected, and educated.

John W. Blassingame notes that

the family, while it had no legal existence in slavery, was in actuality one of the most important survival mechanisms for the slave. In his family he found companionship, love, sexual gratification, sympathetic understanding of his sufferings; he learned how to avoid punishment, to cooperate with other blacks, and to maintain his self-esteem The important thing was not that the family was not recognized legally or that masters frequently encouraged monogamous mating arrangements in the quarters only when it was convenient to do so, but rather that some form of family life did exist among slaves.¹⁵

The moral fiber and foundation of the family was also misshaped by slavery. Uninterested in the true moral conditions of their chattel slaves, "planters were generally more interested in encouraging monogamy because it was conducive to discipline than because of any interest in encouraging morality in the quarters."¹⁶ The frequent rape of black women by their white slave masters as well as by other white males was a destabilizing factor in the black family during slavery. Although not as frequently reported because of the stigma involved

¹⁵Blassingame, 151.

¹⁶Ibid., 153.

with respect to white men, white women's liaisons with black men often contributed to the destabilization of the black family because it heightened the suspicion that all black men were sexual threats though they rarely initiated the dalliance. Moreover, these factors along with the obvious violations of the sanctity of marriage and family among the slaveholder class all rendered the moral admonishments of whites superfluous.

Notions of courtship and sex were different for the African slave than for the European. For the African slave courtship was a ritual affair in which the male enticed the female by displaying the ability to talk well and to engage in determined pursuit. Attitudes toward sex were initially influenced by African notions of the sacredness of procreation and thus the sacredness of sex.

As he was gradually transformed into an Afro-American, the Southern slave lost the African religious significance of sex and procreation. What he retained was the belief that sex was a natural act largely unconnected with sin.¹⁷

While familial morality had been misshaped by slavery, the slave struggled to reshape a familial morality conducive to the overriding concern with survival. Like the family in general, the institution of marriage was assailed by slavery. For the slave, in the context of an honor bound Southern culture the sanctity of marriage, autonomy of the household, and patriarchal patterns of authority were difficult if not impossible to maintain.

After marriage, the slave faced almost insurmountable odds in his efforts to build a strong stable family. First, and most important of all, his authority was restricted by his master. Any decision of his regarding his family could be countermanded by his master. The master determined when both he and his wife would go to work, when or whether his wife cooked his meals, and was often the final arbiter

¹⁷Ibid., 162.

in family disputes.¹⁸

In slavery, ideas of family were rooted in African culture. Although, the African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier argued that any coherent notion of family could not possibly have survived the trek from the interior, the Middle Passage, and the orientation to the New World, certain features of the black family in slavery suggest that some basic African beliefs regarding the family did indeed survive.

Initially, familial roles in the slave quarters were determined by African concepts. Women in most traditional West African societies were subordinate to men As slaves, however, black men could no longer exercise the same power over their families as they had in Africa. Instead, they struggled to gain and retain status. The transformation of African familial roles led to the creation of America's first democratic family in the quarters, where men and women shared authority and responsibility.¹⁹

Herbert Gutman writing on the black family in slavery has suggested that through the act of naming children slaves established and maintained sturdy and complex familial structures that were not dependent on the ties of blood and marriage. He argues that there developed a kind of *fictive kinship* among the slaves. This special kinship replaced, perhaps even during the interior trek and the Middle Passage, those ties of family and clan which were intentionally destroyed by the slave trade.

Kin obligations beyond the immediate slave family did not disintegrate following the emancipation. [During this period] such obligations reunited broken slave families, protected young children against abusive apprenticeship, and shaped the definition of land use and

¹⁸Ibid., 172.

¹⁹Ibid., 177-78.

labor.²⁰

Fictive or quasi kin may also have infused

enlarged slave communities with conceptions of obligations that had flowed initially from kin obligations rooted in blood and marriage. The obligations to a brother or a niece were transformed into the obligations toward a fellow slave or a fellow slave's child, and behavior first determined by familial and kin obligation became enlarged social obligation.²¹

Gutman argues that the "conversion of kin relationship into symbolic (or quasi) kin ties on slave ships is evidence of adaptive behavior, not just evidence that the middle passage had failed to obliterate social memory."²² This idea of fictive or quasi-kin survives today in many African American families. Embodied in generous extended family structures the notion that one can be related to another person so deeply as to be called kin without the benefit of blood or marriage continues to support and nurture generation after generation. Through these families, African Americans are able to survive and to provide for the essential education of their children.

Education in the Slave Community

Education within the slave community must always be understood in the context of prevailing attitudes regarding the value and wisdom of allowing slaves to be educated. That is, the educational practices employed by the slaves themselves were always set in relation to, or over against the imputed value that education would grant to the slave holder, and in

²⁰Herbert G. Gutman, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925 (New York: Random House, 1976), 204.

²¹*Ibid.*, 220.

²²*Ibid.*, 222.

relation to the maintenance of the prevailing social order.

At least three important observations should be made regarding the education of slaves in the antebellum period. The first is that the form and availability of education to the slaves greatly depended on the shifting motives and attitudes of white people regarding its value and functionality. Renowned African American historian Carter G. Woodson notes that

the history of the education of the ante-bellum Negroes, therefore, falls into two periods. The first extends from the time of the introduction of slavery to the climax of the insurrectionary movement about 1835, when the majority of the people in this country answered in the affirmative the question whether or not it was prudent to educate their slaves. Then followed the second period, when the industrial revolution changed slavery from a patriarchal to an economic institution, and when intelligent Negroes, encouraged by abolitionists, made so many attempts to organize servile insurrections that the pendulum began to swing the other way. By this time most southern white people reached the conclusion that it was impossible to cultivate the minds of Negroes without arousing overmuch self-assertion.²³

Abolitionists were interested in educating slaves and ex-slaves because their wonderful ideas of human equality and the dignity and freedom of the individual were rendered moot by the presence of an enslaved group of human beings in their midst. Many of the clergy were also interested because they were convinced that learning to read the Bible would have a civilizing effect on the slave. Many southern slave holders educated their slaves in the practical arts, such as black smithing, and taught them skills and tasks all of which simply increased their productivity and value as slaves. In spite of laws which were subsequently

²³Carter G. Woodson, The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), 2.

passed which outlawed the education of slaves, many of these activities continued. However, the association of education with self-assertion and open rebellion on the part of the slaves made the acquisition of knowledge difficult and risky.

The second observation which needs to be made is that since education purportedly rendered slaves unfit for servitude, educated slaves escaped or were sent to the North. The result was a significant *brain drain* within the slave community. The absence of models of educated African Americans had a significant impact on the slave community.

Most slaves who were once counted as valuable, on account of their ability to read and write the English language, were thereafter considered unfit for service in the South and branded as objects of suspicion. Moreover, when within a generation or so the Negroes began to retrograde because they had been deprived of every elevating influence, the white people of the South resorted to their old habit of answering their critics with the bold assertion that the effort to enlighten the blacks would prove futile on account of their mental inferiority.²⁴

These two observations, namely that the prevailing attitudes of whites had a significant impact on the opportunity for slaves to receive education, and the absence of educated African Americans as models impoverished the slave community are critically important. However, there is a third observation which needs to be made, and that is that the relatively low literacy levels among the white population may have also been contributing factor to the resistance to the education of slaves. Most slaves were not resident on massive plantations with aristocratic masters and mistresses. In contrast to the images portrayed in film and television, most slaves lived on relatively small farms and were owned or supervised by

²⁴Ibid., 10.

persons who were only slightly higher on the social scale than they. Charles H. Nicholls notes the slaves' "masters and overseers were themselves often illiterates or near-illiterates, and they were not going to create 'uppity' Negroes whom they would find it hard to control."²⁵

These factors and others affected the shape, form and function of the education provided to the slave community from the dominant culture. All this meant that the black community in slavery focused on self-education and on indigenous models of education.

Within the slave community education was a matter of life and death. The physical life of the slave often depended on learning the ways of the slave master so that pain could be avoided. The spiritual and intellectual life of the slave depended on the ability of the slave to retrieve and maintain the indigenous cultural knowledge of his/her past. Blassingame notes that

the lessons the slave child learned about conformity were complex and contradictory. Recognizing the overwhelming power of the whites, parents taught children obedience as a means of avoiding pain, suffering, and death. At the same time, they did not teach unconditional submission. Instead, children were often taught to fight their masters and overseers to protect their relatives.²⁶

Education also involved learning the skills of critical assessment and discernment. Behaviors, like texts, had to be read and their inner meaning decoded. Even the models provided by parents had more than one meaning. The education which the slaves obtained from their experience was nothing if not contextual.

²⁵Charles H. Nichols, Many Thousand Gone: The Ex-slaves' Account of Their Bondage and Freedom (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), 45.

²⁶Blassingame, 188.

Listening to stories of runaways and seeing slaves interact in the quarters, the slave child had many models of behavior. In fact, he saw his parents playing two contradictory roles. In the quarters, for example, where he saw his parents most often, his father acted like a man, castigating whites for their mistreatment of him, being a leader, protector, and provider. On the few occasions when the child saw him at work the father was obedient and submissive to his master. Sometimes children internalized both the true personality traits and the contradictory behavioral patterns of their parents. Since, however, their parents' submission was on a shallow level of convenience directed toward avoiding pain, it was less important as a model of behavior than the personality traits they exhibited in the quarters.²⁷

Education involved the survival of the community and not just the elevation of any single individual. It was the responsibility of an entire network of fictive or quasi-kin. Gutman argues that

slaves apparently often addressed all capable leaders as quasi-kin, but children learned to address all older slaves men and women (not just leaders) by kin titles, a practice that perhaps bound them to fictive kinsmen and kinswomen, preparing them in the event that sale or death separated them from parents and blood relatives. Socializing children to respect all elderly blacks also may have taught them to hide slave feelings and beliefs from nonslaves.²⁸

The black family in its extended form endured assault and defamation and became an important part of the educational function in the black community during slavery and beyond.

Conclusion

The formation of community, the retention of culture, and the emergence of nationalism among the newly enslaved Africans formed the contexts of the educational

²⁷Ibid., 188-90.

²⁸Gutman, 219.

practices of the slave community. Here slaves, whenever possible, identified with the struggle for liberation carried on by comrades in Haiti and other parts of the New World. The relationship between God and the socio-political order provided the essential content of the authentic education sought by the slave. That relationship affirmed that the slave was loved by God, created in God's image and never outside of the care of God. Thus, the result of education was always the uplift of the people. The family in both its nuclear and extended forms provided the major conduit for that education. Through the family the essential lessons of living and loving, surviving and overcoming were learned and reinforced. The primary teachers in the community were the elders. Their knowledge, wisdom, and insight were crucial resources which had to be passed down to successive generations so that the community might survive. This education was holistic in that the intellectual, spiritual, and physical survival of the slave community was its aim.

CHAPTER 4

READING THE BIBLE: AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH

Introduction

To suggest that African-Americans have a particular *take* on the Bible requires that we consider what is meant by a *hermeneutical approach*. To do this we must first understand the term hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, as defined in A Concise Dictionary of Theology, means interpretation. It is

the theory and practice of understanding and interpreting texts, biblical or otherwise. Hermeneutics seek to establish the original meaning of a text in its historical context and to express that meaning today. [However, a given] text can contain and convey meaning that goes beyond the original author's explicit intention despite the distance between individual minds and cultures because our common humanity bridges the gap to allow texts to be understood and interpreted.¹

Rahner and Vorgrimler say that "hermeneutics attempts to reconcile the process of tradition with aspects of one's own tradition."²

Inherent in the preceding definitions of hermeneutic is the acknowledgment that original texts, for our purposes the Bible, exist in and document *real* socio-historical contexts

¹Gerald O'Collins and Edward G. Farrugia, A Concise Dictionary of Theology. Rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 103.

²Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, "Hermeneutics," in Concise Theological Dictionary (London: Burns & Oates, 1983), 208.

addressing particular conditions experienced by *real* people. Further, the definition suggests that it is a universally accepted practice that historical situations and resolutions are invaluable for providing insight for future generations enabling them to extrapolate and adapt past experience for their own use and survival.

An African-American hermeneutical approach to scripture is not unique, human experience created a bridge between them and the God/gods, and the people of the Bible. According to Renita Weems, “depending upon the social location of the reader, the history of African Americans exemplifies the ways in which the Bible can and has been used, in the name of its supposed authority, to sanction the subjugation and enslavement of people or to instigate insurrection.”³ In the lived reality of African-Americans and those of their ancestors, scripture is central because it brings to bear their “social location and experience upon the reading and interpretation of the Bible.”⁴

How did scripture come to occupy a central role in the lives of black people? Henry Mitchell writes in the Encyclopedia of African American Religions,

that there was a great deal of overlap between ATR (African Traditional Religion and O. T. (the Jewish Bible or Christian ‘Old Testament’) . . . Africans could identify the commonalities and benefits from a kind of ‘head start’ into the Christian faith.

This faith was not unlike their own ATR in pivotal doctrines, such as the omnipotence (cf. Olodumare of the Yoruba), omniscience (cf.

³Renita J. Weems, “African American Women and the Bible,” in Stony the Road We Trod: An African American Biblical Hermeneutic, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 63.

⁴James Earl Massey, “Reading the Bible as African Americans,” in The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 154.

Brekvirihunuade of the Ashanti), and omnipresence of their deity. The favorite folk doctrine of all the tribes was the providence of God, expressed in exquisitely symbolic proverbs: 'God is the One who fans the flies for the cow who has no tail.' It was not hard to embrace a Savior whose own religious roots were so like those of the ATR, and who was 'buked and scorned' like unto themselves. So their traditional religion/faith was like and African Old Testament, preparing them for Christ, to whom they were drawn with touching devotions.⁵

Mitchell's assertion is borne out by Olaudah Equiano's (a.k.a. Gustavus Vassa) reflection on his initial reading of the Bible. Equiano was born to noble Ibo parentage in Benin, or present day Nigeria. At the age of eleven he was kidnaped and eventually sold into slavery to British Naval officers. He purchased his freedom in July of 1766. His remarkable *Narrative*, published in 1789 is one of the earliest accounts of life in Africa and the horrors of the Middle Passage. When Equiano was introduced to the Bible, he declared that it contained "the laws of my own country written almost exactly."⁶

Kidnaped and enslaved Africans like Equiano embraced the Bible for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is because they found therein

ancient symbols of their predicament: the saga of the Egyptian bondage, the devastation of Assyrian invasions, the deportation into Babylonian captivity, and the bedevilment by principalities and powers of the present age. Blacks have consequently developed and 'experiential sympathy' with much of the Bible which in turn receives

⁵Henry Mitchell, "Preaching and the Preacher in African American Religion," in Encyclopedia of African American Religions, ed. Larry G. Murphy, et al. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 608.

⁶Olaudah Equiano, "Traditional Ibo Religion and Culture," in Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness, ed. Milton C. Sernett (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 13-18.

their reverent attention as quite literally the revealed Word of God.⁷

In addition to entering the American colonies with a sophisticated sacred cosmology, enslaved Africans learned the import of the Bible from their captors. Vincent Wimbush details how black people hijacked the biblical hermeneutics that many white Americans intended for them. He states,

the sacralization of the Bible among white evangelical Protestants North and South, could hardly have been ignored by the Africans. . . The lesson that the Africans learned from [white Christians] was not only that faith was to be interpreted in light of the reading of the Bible, but also that each person had freedom of interpretation of the Bible. Given differences between individuals and different [Protestant] religious groups, the Africans learned that they, too, could read 'the Book' freely. They could read certain parts and ignore others. They could and did articulate their interpretations in their own way - in song, prayers, sermons, testimonies, and addresses. By the end of the century 'the Book' had come to represent a virtual language-world that they, too, could enter and manipulate in light of their social experiences.⁸

Therefore, one can see that in the black experience, "the spiritual and the political are completely intertwined."⁹

In conclusion, the Bible is central to the African-American experience because

it was scripture that enabled slaves to affirm a view of God that differed radically from that of the slave masters. The slave masters' intention was to present a 'Jesus' who would make the slave obedient

⁷Cain Hope Felder, Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class and Family (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 6.

⁸Vincent L. Wimbush, "The Bible and African-Americans: An Outline of an Interpretative History," in Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Hermeneutic, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 86-87.

⁹Brian K. Blount, Go Preach! Mark's Kingdom Message and the Black Church Today (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 239.

and docile. Jesus was supposed to make black people better slaves, that is faithful servants of white masters.¹⁰

The expectation of a docile slave was thwarted by slaves such as Henry Bibb who writes of the trader who sold him. “He tried to speculate on my Christian character. He tried to make it appear that I was so pious and honest that I would not run away for ill treatment, which was a gross mistake, for I never had religion enough to keep me from running away from slavery in my life.”¹¹

The Bible as a Vehicle of Mis-Education

Carter G. Woodson wrote of the mis-education of the Negro in a book bearing that title. In the book, Woodson describes appropriate and inadequate approaches to educating Negroes in various disciplines. In the exposition of his work, Woodson sees pedagogical flaws in educating Negroes by Negroes and whites alike. However, in this present work, I do not intend to engage Woodson’s slant on the historical insufficiency of education for black people. I limit myself here to *borrowing* Woodson’s title, The Mis-education of the Negro,¹² to demonstrate how the Bible has been used as both a tool for mis-educating and educating black people in the United States.

As a tool for mis-education, the Bible was used by whites (slaver owners and church leaders) in various ways, James Massey highlights three arguments slave owners used for

¹⁰James H. Cone, God of the Oppressed (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1975), 31.

¹¹Henry Bibb, Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb: An American Slave (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1974[?]), 102.

¹²Carter G. Woodson, The Mis-education of the Negro (Washington, D. C.: AMS Press, 1977.).

providing religious instruction to slaves. First, for those slave owners professing to be Christian, it was their duty (mission)

to show concern for the eternal salvation of their slaves. The second was profit. Religious instruction, if successful, was expected to influence the character, morale, behavior, and more output of slaves. The third argument was that of decreased risk of possible slave rebellions, since converted slaves would be expected to obey the Pauline injunction to be obedient to their master.¹³

Slaves were taught to revere the Bible as sacred text. They repeatedly heard sermons and admonitions that called for docility and obedience to masters, overseers and whites in general, regardless to their cruelty. J. W. Lindsay, a former slave recounted that the scriptures most frequently used by the master's minister were, "Servants, obey your masters"; and "he that knoweth his master's will & doth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."¹⁴ Timidity and acceptance of servanthood on the part of slaves insured them that their reward awaited them in heaven. For this reason, many black people had great disdain for the Pauline Epistles. Howard Thurman, recalling an event between he and his grandmother, poignantly demonstrates the point. He writes that

during much of my boyhood I was cared for by my grandmother, who was born a slave and lived until the Civil War on a plantation near Madison, Florida. My regular chore was to do most of the reading for my grandmother - she could neither read nor write. Two or three times a week I read the Bible aloud to her. I was deeply impressed by the fact that she was most particular about the choice of Scripture.

¹³Massey, 155. For further discussion on the economic benefits of slavery, see Albert Raboteau, Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 98; and John Wesley, Thoughts Upon Slavery (London, 1774), 11.

¹⁴J. W. Lindsay, quoted in Massey, 155.

For instance, I might read many of the more devotional Psalms, some of Isaiah, the Gospels again and again. But the Pauline epistles, never - except, at long intervals, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. My curiosity knew no bounds, but we did not question her about anything.

When I was older and was half through college, I chanced to be spending a few days at home near the end of summer vacation. With a feeling of great temerity I asked her one day why it was that she would not let me read any of the Pauline letters. What she told me I shall never forget. 'During the days of slavery,' she said, 'the master's minister would occasionally hold services for the slaves. Old man McGhee was so mean that he would not let a negro minister preach to his slaves. Always the white minister used as his text something from Paul. At least three or four times a year he used as a text: 'Slaves, be obedient to them that are your masters . . . , as unto Christ.' Then he would go on to show how it was God's will that we were slaves and how, if we were good and happy slaves, God would bless us. I promised my Maker that if I ever learned to read and if freedom ever came, I would not read that part of the Bible.'¹⁵

Further, slaves were taught to be pious and humble; to refrain from haughtiness, sloth, lying, stealing and killing. Yet, the slave routinely observed contradictions in the *white folks'* use of the Bible. The behavior of white people was wholly unlike those expected from slaves, although the good book (Bible) put forth prescribed expectations governing conduct. Black people could not ignore the double standard that called them to piety when they had been stolen from their homeland, beaten, raped, sold like produce, resold for groceries, instructed to steal and lie. As long as the impiety of slaves benefitted their owner or the *whites-in-charge*, sinful acts were accepted and frequently encouraged. Never before had the enslaved African seen religion separated from practice.

¹⁵Howard Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), 30-31.

How is it that whites were able to detach themselves from the suffering of another to not only condone, but justify chattel slavery? Evidentiary data suggests slaving occurred and persisted over a long period of time because those in the trade were successful at denying the humanity of Africans/black people, justifying slavery by claiming it as an ideal way of evangelizing heathens, placing economic interests above human interests and/or divine mandates, and by compartmentalizing religion.

For Africans, not devoid of a well integrated sacred cosmology, the behavior of *religious* white people ran counter to their African ethic of humanism. The African view of humanism attended to and accentuated the well being of every person and worked to establish universal good. What this meant was that every African was as concerned with their fellow human enjoying the good life as they were with attaining it. The biblical love ethic interfaced with their understanding of God, enabling them to embrace the white man's *book religion* while simultaneously rejecting the hypocrisy of white men.

Rather than serving as an oppressive device, the Bible provided the enslaved African with a model of resistance and a means of education. "This hermeneutic enabled them to measure what they had been told about God, reality, and themselves against what they had experienced of God and reality and what they thought of themselves as it has been mediated to them by the primary community with which they identified."¹⁶ Africans initially encountered the Bible as a forced form of assimilation, thrust upon them to assure the annihilation of any and all residual kernels of their native culture. However, they too used the Bible, as a positive form of assimilation and education, learning the inner workings of the

¹⁶Weems, 66.

white man's world. From the Bible, enslaved blacks learned words. Words that enabled them to understand their captors and apply a hermeneutic that abolished distinctions between them and their captors. In the exposition of the Hebrew and Christian canons, enslaved blacks saw their *old* sacred cosmology described by communities who shared a world view common to theirs, where there was no distinction between the sacred and the secular. The Bible, as read and understood by black people did not foster inferiority. Instead of perpetual captivity and servitude, black people saw their liberation as an inevitability because their liberator was none other than God incarnate in Jesus Christ. The Bible provided an elaborate cover for enslaved blacks, replete with symbology that camouflaged the African sacred cosmos.

Another contradiction soon surfaced with regard to black peoples exposure to the Bible. Used initially as a tool of assimilation by whites, the Bible became a powerful tool for black people. They did learn to read and speak English by using the Bible. However, these supposed *inferior beings* possessed analytical skills that surpassed the expectations of the oppressors. Slaves not only learned to read, they came to understand themselves as the *chosen* people of God based on their interpretation of biblical texts. As a result of slaves *re-reading* biblical texts in ways not intended, and seeing in them themes that realigned them to the African sacred cosmos, the continued desire for freedom was strengthened and validated by scripture. As a result, non-sanctioned religious meetings sprang up, slave insurrections became commonplace and the malignancy of *white religious hypocrisy* became intolerable because scripture was now used by black people as a tool of empowerment. Consequently, blacks were legally forbidden to read, which in part was because (1) they had forgotten and ignored *their place* in the socio-political state of slavocracy, and (2) created a dilemma to

their under and uneducated overseers and/or masters because of the education levels they were achieving, as noted above. In essence, “the experience of oppression forced the marginalized reader to retain the right, as much as possible, to resist those things within the culture and the Bible that one [found] obnoxious or antagonistic to one’s innate sense of identity and to one’s basic instincts for survival.”¹⁷

Generative Themes in the Bible

What did black people see in the Bible that made them receptive to its percepts given their religious and socio-political experience in America? I suggest three recurring generative themes that engendered the Bible to enslaved blacks and their descendants. The generative themes are covenant, liberation, and justice.

Covenant

Starting with Abram, black people saw God select someone to be God’s *chosen* people. What Abram did to warrant his *chosenness* the enslaved African could do . . . believe in and trust God, after all, they had observed their ancestors in relationship with God in their homeland and they had been taught that they were kin to the Grand Ancestor God. In addition to Abram’s faith, God promised that nations would be blessed because of him and the slaves saw themselves included in that blessing. Further, Abram and his wife Sarai had had their names changed. Abram became Abraham and Sarai became Sarah. Here too enslaved Africans identified with being *chosen* because in many instances their names had been changed. The covenantal relationship between God and Abraham, marked by the ritual of circumcision, signified an unbreakable bond between God and God’s *chosen*. Black people

¹⁷Ibid., 63.

entered a covenantal relationship with God through the circumcision of their heart (repentance and conversion). Further, black people understood the covenant as a gracious act by God, and humanity's proper response was to obey the statutes and commandments of God, who would in turn reward them accordingly.¹⁸

Liberation

As a group, enslaved blacks identified with the enslaved Hebrews described in biblical texts. Vincent Wimbush says that black people

were attracted primarily to the narratives of the Hebrew Bible dealing with the adventures of the Hebrews in bondage and escaping from bondage, to the oracles of the eighth-century prophets and their denunciations of social injustice and visions of social justice, and to the New Testament texts concerning the compassion, passion, and resurrection of Jesus. With these and other texts, the African American Christians laid the foundations for what can be seen as an emerging 'canon'. . . Faith became identification with the heroes and heroines of the Hebrew Bible and with the long-suffering but ultimately victorious Jesus. As the people of God in the Hebrew Bible were once delivered from enslavement, so the Africans sang and shouted, would they be delivered. As Jesus suffered unjustly but was raised from the dead to new life, so, they sang, would they be 'raised' from their 'social death' to new life.¹⁹

In the Exodus narrative, one can observe a people re-learning. What did they re-learn? I contend they were learning anew, how to be in relationship with and trust God. Just as the enslaved Israelites had forgotten the God of their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so too, under the stress and strain of slavery, had the enslaved Africans forgotten their bond to the God of their ancestors. While both of the enslaved groups had had their understanding of

¹⁸Wheeler Robinson, Inspirations and Revelation in the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 150-55.

¹⁹Wimbush, 86-87.

God challenged, they came to understand that God was on the side of the oppressed. As long as the captors could control the cultic practices and beliefs of their chattel they were safe and comfortable in their positions of authority. However, when the authority of the oppressor encountered the sovereignty of God because of the cries of the oppressed, a new paradigm was created, liberation by the hand of God. The *little man* or spirit in the enslaved Africans understood liberation as a God given right.

Black people saw the covenantal bond between God and humanity renewed with successive generations of Hebrews. Starting with Abraham, Hebrews were constituted of a mixed multitude (Exod. 12:38) not a single ethnic group. Faith, not ethnicity, linked one to God and the covenant. For black Christians, the covenantal process continued in Jesus Christ. This means that through the salvific work of Christ in his passion, they saw themselves in the image and likeness of God. In Christ, made possible at conversion, slaves and their descendants acknowledge the insufficiency of their existence separate from God, and that some degree of *incommensurability* exists between themselves and an all powerful God. The Bible taught them that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”²⁰

Historically, it has been understood by black people that God governs history and in God’s stead on earth leaders/intermediaries, are enthroned, called and/or commissioned. This is vividly expressed in the biblical offices of king and prophet. The free will of the Israelites

²⁰Gal. 3:28. When referring to biblical text, unless otherwise specified, the King James Version will be used because it was the version that black people initially encountered and a primary educational tool that was used to teach slaves to read.

demanding a king in the similitude of surrounding nations, effectively denouncing the rule of God (I Samuel 8:7). Unwilling to leave the elect to their own devices and demise, Israelite kings were anointed to serve as earthly embodiments of God by executing justice (II Sam. 8:15; I Kings 10:9, II Chron. 9:8, Ps. 82, Prov. 16: 12; 29) and modeling *right* cultic practices as prescribed by God (Exod. 20:3, 6; I Kings 6:11-13; II Kings 17: 35-39).

What can be said of prophets/prophesy? The institution of prophesy had its genesis in the Old Testament and is linked to and contemporary with monarchies, specifically the kings of Israel and Judah (I Sam. 8:6-10; 10: 1, 16; I Kings 17:2ff; Isa. 1:1-9; Jer. 1:1-10; Hos. 1:1; Amos 6: 10ff). Moreover, Old Testament prophets were best known as social critics of social injustices (Amos 4:1-3, 5; 5:24) and cultic idolatry (I Sam. 13, 15:10-23; I Kings 19: 17ff, Isa. 1:20-20; Jer. 1:22-19; Amos 4:4-5, 5:21-27). The office of prophet was not inherited like the kingship, nor was it typically an appointed position, therefore the prophet was not bound by political alliances or economic influences that engendered favor to the king and/or status quo, which freed him to speak the message God had commanded. As spokespersons for Yahweh, prophets became emboldened messengers of God, functioning under the unction of the Spirit.

In the prophetic moment, God interrupted history, declaring through the prophet impending destruction or devastation if there was not a cessation to injustice. Usually, these actions were precipitated by the failure of leaders, specifically kings, to administer justice equitably, practice moral integrity, engage in ordained cultic practices that involved worshiping the true and living God, and showing mercy. Basically, the prophet served as mediator between God and the people, calling a wayward nation back into a faithful

relationship with God. This faithfulness was not to be divorced from any aspect of life, to the contrary, life was to be a continual living out of one's religion.

Justice

Black people are thoroughly convinced that they indeed have a relationship with God through an adoptive process (Rom. 8:15-25), and that the divine code of justice applied to them. Innately, and as validated by scripture, black people knew slavery, Jim Crowism and segregation, and apartheid to be social injustices, not ordained by God. Although they had not lived in biblical times, enslaved blacks and their descendants appropriated the text so completely that the Bible became their recorded history with God. Therefore, black people believe that

no prophecy receives its full and final fulfillment in one given historical moment only, or even in a series of events. If the prophecy is the expression of an undeniable truth which comes from God, it will be fulfilled at different times and in different ways in the history of the world. What was true [at one point in history] is proven to be true over and over again in the history of the church of Jesus Christ in the world.²¹

God's attention to the injustices of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, allowed the oppressed community in Revelation to have faith that God would not abandon them. Subsequently, because history had shown God to be on the side of the oppressed and socially marginalized, enslaved black people and their descendants could believe freedom, spiritual and physical, would come and that it would be a God act as illustrated by the myth of High John de Conquer.

²¹Allan A. Boesak, Comfort and Protest: Reflections on the Apocalypse of John of Patmos (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 28-29.

High John De Conquer

High John come over from Afrika, walkin on de waves of sound, companying enslaved Afrikans durin de Middle Passage. In de beginend, High John wud'n no natchal man. In Afrika, he wuz a whispur, a will to hope, a wish to find sumtin werf lafta and song, cause Black people luv ta laf and sang. It wud'n til High John reached Merican soil dat he come ta be a natchal man, and a mighty man at dat. Dough folk couldn't scribe him, slave folk knowed him in de flesh, his sign was a laf, and his singing-symbol wuz a drum beat.

Ta say slave folk knowed him in the flesh meant it wuz an inside thang. High John wuz sho to be heard when and whar de work wuz the hardest, and de lot de most krul. The presence of High John helped de slaves endur, to bleeve dat better wuz coming, give em de bility to laf and sang in de face of hard times and krul treatment.

High John showed up in ways that slaves knowed, and ways Ole Massa couldn't ject ta, sich as dem tales of Brer Rabbit. High John hope the slaves to remember dat Heaven arms wid luv and lafta those it don't wanna see destroyed. Helps em ta be 'Be' class folk. Be here when hard times comes, be here when they's gone.

High John brung word a hundid yeas in advance dat thar wuz gone be a end ta slavery. Long fo the whites folk knowed anythang. Twert no war that freed the slaves, de war wus jest a symbol of the thangs that wuz really going on. He taught us how ta trabel outside ourself ta a place whar God gives a song and plants lafter in yo hearts.²²

For black people, the biblical text and its tenor of love and justice recreated the indigenous social organization that sustained them in Africa and during the slave experience, that of community. For them, the God:humanity "covenant created community which gave meaning to the individual; it supplies the norms of right and wrong; it [is] rooted in legal

²²Adapted from Zora Neale Hurston, The Sanctified Church - The Folklore Writing of Zora Neale Hurston (Berkeley: Turtle Island, 1981), 69-78.

compact [that is not dogmatic in its legalism, stressing instead] a mutuality of life.”²³ The communal/cultic aspect of biblical texts inspired enslaved Africans and their descendants to align themselves with the God of the Bible because in the recorded Word, vestiges of their world view and experience was reflected. Just as mutuality in community was a major tenant, according to Wright, “the dissolution of covenant meant the disintegration of a society,”²⁴ and blacks understand slavery as a breach of the God:human covenant because it was contrary to an ethic of love. Injustice represents dysfunction and disintegration in the black community and that, they believe, is not of God. Therefore, a common humanity, a beloved community is the ultimate goal. T. S. Eliot captured the essence of community in the world view of black Christians, saying,

What life have you if you have not life together?
There is no life that is not in community,
And no community not lived in praise of God.²⁵

Black Christians perceive that the divine covenant extends beyond God and humanity to encompass the dialectical relationship between humans and their neighbors, and oneself.²⁶ It is this dialectical relationship that summons us to the beloved community. The summons of one humanity also calls for freedom and justice for all.

²³G. Ernest Wright, “The Faith of Israel,” in The Interpreter’s Bible(Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), 311-30.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵T. S. Eliot, “Choruses from ‘The Rock’ ” in The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909 - 1950. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1971), 101.

²⁶Walter Brueggemann, The Covenanted Self: Explorations in Law and Covenant (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 6-16.

The Role, Function and Form of Education in the Bible

Education in the Bible should be understood in terms of its role in the formation of communal and personal identity, it functions as a means by which the past is recovered and the future is anticipated, and its form is intergenerational. The goal and purpose of education in the Bible as African slaves perceived it was the formation of a communal identity. This formation took place against an implicit backdrop of non-identity of the enslavement and oppression of the children of Israel. The book of Exodus records these words of God which Moses is instructed to deliver to the people.

Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.' (Exod. 6:6-7)

In the New Testament the same theme of the creation of a new communal identity is appropriated in the Book of Acts, by Luke who reminds his listeners of the relationship between God's act of choosing the people of Israel, giving them an identity and God's deliverance of them from Egypt (Acts 13:16). He goes further, however, and opens the act of divine choosing and thus the whole notion of the people of God to the Gentiles or the entire world (Acts 15:14). Chosenness is thus no longer exclusively linked to physical genealogy, but is available to all who are bound by faith to God.

The fundamental purpose of education in the Bible, as the African slaves saw it, is the creation of a community of faith. African slaves readily adapted this understanding of education to their own particular situation. In their quest for literacy and knowledge African

slaves read the Bible and other works in order to understand who they were against the backdrop of non-identity, and whose they were in light of the claim of slavery upon their persons. This desire to understand was a powerful force in the formation of community and was undergirded what they read in the Bible or heard that coincided with their beliefs.

The function of education in the Bible is a means by which the past is recovered and the future is anticipated. Throughout the Old Testament the people of Israel looked back over their sojourn and discerned a pattern to God's activity in relation to them. This pattern or *providence* suggests that God's liberating activity is the key to understanding who God is. Because God is the one who frees them from bondage, God lays claim to the community through his commandments. The memory of this liberation is reenacted in dance, recited in poetry, relived in ritual, and remembered in various cultic activities. Education is the means by which the memory of God's faithfulness is kept ever fresh. Education is not merely the study of the past but the living of life according to its precepts and lessons. For Israel the past is inextricably tied to the future. Liberation from slavery in the Old Testament is tied to freedom from sin in the New Testament. This freedom is anticipated and in some sense fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Instead of writing the commandments of God on one's heart, the faithful are given the promise that the spirit of Christ will be with them always. The central ritual of freedom is that of baptism, and the central ritual of anticipation is the Lord's Supper. Within these ritual frames, the promised future of God becomes clear. Education is the means by which hope is kept alive. Education is not merely an exercise in imagination, it is the means by which persons continue to live in the promise.

African slaves lived with the dangerous memory of their African past. Clandestine

education allowed them to remember that past. That past was the key to freedom from enslavement by negative associations and stereotypes. It was also key to their hopes for the future. In the Bible African slaves saw educational practices which spoke to their need to preserve their past and fire their hopes.

The form of education in the Bible is intergenerational. It is intergenerational because knowledge of God is vibrant. This knowledge must exist in and through persons and communities. This knowledge is so important to the continuance of the community that it is given to the community in the form of commandments which must be passed from one generation to the next. Therefore, Israel is enjoined to hold dear the commandments of God.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deut. 6:6-8)

This kind of education always points to the past and the future simultaneously. “In the future, when your children shall ask, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulation, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you.’ tell them: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand’ (Deut. 6:20-21). Through this kind of education each generation is tied to its successor and its predecessor by the providence and promise of God.

African slaves placed great hope in the achievements of subsequent generations. This was especially true as hope was sought in the face of each newborn. The hope of liberation

had to be taught, and each generation was required to pass on its knowledge to the next.

Conclusion

The primary role of education as practiced in the Bible, is a call to faithful and dialectical relationship with God, neighbor and oneself, grounded in love and justice. The Bible serves a practical function in the educative process because all of life was to be subsumed under the rubric of cultic life, which again focused on the dialectical relationship between God, humanity and oneself.

The dominant educational practice in the Bible that is of import to black people is ritual. Ritual, defined in Chapter 2 as an established ceremonial act, involving a series of exercises, is the keystone for the dialectical relationship between God and humanity. The ritual process is a way in which communion takes place between the divine and the created order, bringing each to remember and honor the other. The ritual act symbolically reflects a spiritual reality. God is remembered, present, and expected to perform in an authoritative way on behalf of those participating in the ritual.

CHAPTER 5
AN INDIGENOUS BLACK RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MODEL
FOR THE BLACK CHURCH

The Historic Black Church: An Introduction

The Black Church has existed for centuries in the United States as the premier institution in the lives of black people. Mays and Nicholson provide insight regarding why the Black Church has historically occupied a prominent place in the African American experience. They write, “the church was the first community or public organization that the Negro actually owned and completely controlled. And it is possibly true to this day that the Negro church is the most thoroughly owned and controlled public institution of the race.”¹

When referring to the historic Black Church, I am speaking of black churches whose membership and local leadership was composed of black people. I am focusing on the period prior to legally mandated integration. I contend that integration provided new social outlets to black people and in the process the historic Black Church was weakened, losing its place as the major social center and agent in the black community.

Although the Black Church served a major social role in black communities, it has

¹Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson, The Negro's Church (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933), 279.

never existed as a monolith.² This means that black churches have historically conducted and lived out their Christian, cultural and social witness in varied forms, relying on scripture, experience, reason, tradition, and available resources. The independent Black Church was born out of the religious and social persecution of black people.

According to Lawrence Jones, the preeminent religious reason for the founding of the Black Church was failure on the part of all but a *remnant* of the white Christian establishment to pursue aggressively its mission on behalf of Christ among black people.³ He states further that white churchmen failed “to treat their brothers with equity, respect, care, concern, and love.”⁴ Inherent in Jones’ statement is a belief in a universal humanity or kinship. A view shared by some (perhaps Jones’ proverbial remnant) church leaders such as John Wesley, who writes,

O thou God of love . . . thou who art loving to every man, and whose mercy is over all thy works; thou who art the Father of the spirits of all flesh, and who art rich in mercy unto all; thou who hast mingled of one blood all the nations upon the earth; have compassion upon these outcasts of men, who are trodden down as dung upon the earth! Arise, and help these that have no helper, whose blood is spilt upon the ground like water! Are not these also the work of thine own hand, the purchase of thy Son’s blood? Stir them up to cry unto thee in the land of their captivity; and let their complaint come up before thee; let

²This point is reiterated by Diana L. Hayes in And Still We Rise (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 17.

³Lawrence N. Jones. “They Sought A City: The Black Church and Churchmen in the Nineteenth Century”; Reprint, Union Seminary Quarterly Review, 26 (Spring, 1971), in Afro-American Religious History: Documents and Interpretations, comp. Milton C. Sernett, an anthology of readings for AAS 345, REL 245, Afro-American Religious History (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1981), 105.

⁴Ibid.

it enter into thy ears! Make even those that lead them away captive to pity them, and turn their captivity as the rivers in the south. O burst thou all their chains in sunder, more especially the chains of their sins! Thou Saviour of all, make them free, that they may be free indeed!⁵

However, a universal kinship which included black people was not widely accepted by proponents of slavery. Moreover, a prevailing view denied the humanity of black people, slave or free. An entry from the journal of Frances Kemble, a plantation mistress, attests to the perceived inhumanity of slaves, equating them with livestock. She writes,

every woman who is pregnant, is relieved of a certain portion of her work in the field. Certain additions of clothing and an additional weekly ration are bestowed upon the family. The more frequently she adds to the number of her master's livestock by bringing new slaves into the world, the more claims she will have upon his consideration and good will.⁶

In earlier discussions it was noted that the Bible and Christianity were used by some clergy and proponents of slavery as oppressive devices in the assimilation process of black people. The Church of England held that the African/Negro slave was an infidel, and they needed to be Christianized. Religious education occurred among black people through clergy and organizations such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (founded in 1701).⁷ Religious education among black people occurred although on the part of many slave owners there was great apprehension. This apprehension created an

⁵Wesley, Thoughts Upon Slavery, (London, 1774), 12.

⁶Frances Anne Kemble, Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839 (New York: New American Library, 1961), 95, cited in Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter - The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America, (New York: William Morrow, Quill, 1984), 45-46.

⁷Frank Tannenbaum, Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas (New York: Vintage Books, 1946), 83.

atmosphere where the Church, and subsequently many slave owners, were indifferent to and negligent in their responsibility for the Christian care and nurture of slaves. There was economic profit to be made in chattel slavery and the economic interests of the slave owner took precedence over missionary work (even when it was well intended) undertaken with slaves.

Ironically, colonists justified slavery saying it provided an opportunity to spread the gospel to heathens. However, missionary attempts at proselytizing slaves continued to encounter resistance from planters because they feared that among other things, conversion and baptism would emancipate slaves.⁸ This fear was due in part to the veiled British law that held that “a Christian could not be held a slave, [therefore, many white Christians] opposed proselytizing [slaves].”⁹

By allowing that a conversion experience and baptism did not emancipate slaves, the church became not only silent but complicitious in the slave trade. The church conformed to social pressures and thereby reinforced and supported the economic interests of the slave owner over and against Christian precepts. This point is illustrated by Reverend Francis Le Jau, an Anglican minister, in his discussion of religious instruction among slaves. Reverend Le Jau reports,

to remove all pretense from the Adult Slaves I shall baptise of their being ffree upon that Account, I have thought fit to require first their consent to this following declaration. You declare in the Presence of God and before this Congregation that you do not ask for the holy baptism out of any design to ffree yourself from Duty and Obedience

⁸Raboteau, 98.

⁹Woodson, The History of the Negro Church, 2.

you owe to your Master while you live, but meerly for the good of your Soul and to partake of the Graces and Blessings promised to the Members of the Church of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

Le Jau, by his actions, attempted to dichotomize the slave by compartmentalizing and separating body from soul, an unknown concept in African traditional and biblical thought. Raboteau concludes, "it seemed that the Christian commission to preach the gospel to all nations ran directly counter to the economic interest of the Christian slave owner."¹¹ Implicit in Raboteau's conclusion is an understanding of the liberative nature of the gospel and Christianity, a concept denied to slaves by whites and mainline denominations.

When the Bible and Christianity were used as propagandistic devices of subjugation, black people were encouraged to imbibe their tenets. Slave owners and the institutionalized church failed to realize that learning occurs naturally and out of necessity for every person. For selfish reasons the dominant society had vested interests in governing what a person learned and how that person evolved.¹² However, "no society, no matter how oppressive, can truly eclipse the learning process. And what the learner learns does not always [fit] into what

¹⁰Francis Le Jau, "Slave Conversion on the Carolina Frontier," in Afro-American Religious History: a Documentary Witness, ed. Milton C. Sernett (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 25.

¹¹Raboteau, 98.

¹²J. Gordon Chamberlin, Toward a Phenomenology of Education (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1969), 23.

the society expects.”¹³ Therefore, in spite of the intended purposes, black people embraced the Bible and Christianity because of their liberative themes and educative value. Because leaders of slave revolts and insurrections claimed to have received directives from God, slaves were held in suspicion and legally forbidden to read.¹⁴ As a result, social and religious activities of black people were curtailed, ended, or supervised by whites. In this hostile social climate, the rise of the independent black church had as much to do with the socio-political needs of black people as it did with their spiritual needs. Many examples exist that document the length slaves went to in order to exercise their religious beliefs. Wash Wilson, a former slave, provides insight into the clandestine religious meeting of slaves saying,

when de niggers go round singin’ ‘Steal Away to Jesus,’ dat mean dere gwine be a ‘ligious meetin’ dat night. De masters . . . didn’t like dem ‘ligious meetin’s, so us natcherly slips off at night, down in de bottoms or somewhere. Sometimes us sing and pray all night.¹⁵

Therefore, social and religious persecution of black people led to their separation and eventual expulsion from common public worship in mainline denominations.¹⁶ Bishop Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church records the event that led to his departure from St. George Methodist Church and thus, the founding of the first African American denomination. Allen recorded that

¹³Riggins R. Earl, Jr., “To You Who Teach in the Black Church: A Mandate for Exploration” in To You Who Teach in the Black Church - Essays on Christian Education in the Black Church, ed. Riggins R. Earl, Jr., (Nashville: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1982), 40.

¹⁴Woodson, Education of the Negro Prior to 1861, 2-3.

¹⁵Wash Wilson, cited in Raboteau, 213.

¹⁶Mays and Nicholson, 37.

a number of us usually attended St. George's church in Fourth Street; and when the colored people began to get numerous in attending the church, they moved us from the seats we usually sat on, and placed us around the wall, and on Sabbath morning we went to church and the sexton stood at the door and told us to go in the gallery. He told us to go, we would see where to sit. We expected to take the seats over the ones we formerly occupied below, not knowing any better. We took those seats. Meeting had begun, and they were nearly done singing, and just as we got to the seats, the elder said "Let us pray." We had not been long upon our knees before I heard a considerable scuffling and low talking, I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees, H___ M___, having hold of the Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him up off his knees, and saying, "You must get up-you must not kneel here." Mr. Jones replied, "Wait until prayer is over." Mr. H___ M___ said, "No, you must get up now or I will call for aid and force you away." Mr. Jones said, "Wait until prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more." With that he beckoned to one of the other Trustees, Mr. L___ S___ to come to his assistance. He came to William White, to pull him up. By this time prayer was over, and we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church. This raised a great excitement and inquiry among the citizens, in so much that I believe that they were ashamed of their conduct . . . we had subscribed largely towards finishing St. George's church, in building the gallery and laying the new floors, and just as the house was made comfortable, we were turned out from enjoying the comforts of worshipping therein.¹⁷

The Black Church, out of religious and social necessity, and its understanding of biblical precepts became a social institution. Here the broken hearted and socially marginalized found relief from the social ills inflicted upon them by oppressive social structures. Additionally, religion provided the veil for education, solace and the march toward freedom. In the Black Church, nobodies became somebodies. May and Nicholson said that the Negro church was the "training school that [gave] the masses of the race

¹⁷Richard Allen, The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labors (Philadelphia: A. M. E. Book Concern, 1960) cited in The Negro's Church, Mays and Nicholson, 21-22.

opportunity to develop.”¹⁸ According to W. E. B. Dubois, the Negro church “reproduced in microcosm, all that great world from which the Negro is cut off by color prejudice and social condition Practically, [he claimed] a proscribed people must have a social centre, and that centre for this people is the Negro church.”¹⁹

Influence of the Three Foundational Sources on the Black Church

As the independent Black Church took shape, how were its organizing principles formulated? How was its mission formed and from what sources did it draw and why? Although the Atlantic slave trade was legally ended on January 1, 1801 by the Congress of the United States,²⁰ full emancipation did not occur until January 1, 1863. In the intervening years between the prohibition of the slave trade and emancipation, the transport of contraband Africans continued. In addition to supplying the Republic with free labor, the African world view and spirituality was also being shipped in, embodied in enslaved Africans. Africans brought with them an emphasis on community, interrelatedness between themselves and the sacred cosmos, and an identity intimately connected to the divine. With each boat load of Africans, the African world view of community, religiosity and zeal for freedom was reinvigorated. Regardless of slave codes and oppressive structures, the influence of Africa

¹⁸Mays and Nicholson, 281- 88. For further discussion on the social role of the Black Church before and after Emancipation see Woodson, History of the Negro Church, 242 - 60.

¹⁹W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (Boston: Bedford Books,1997), 151.

²⁰Richard Peters, ed., “1807 U. S. Law on Slave Trade”available from @<http://amistad.mysticseaport.org/library/govt.papers/legis/1807.act.barsslavetrade.html>; Internet; accessed 15 October 00.

remained strong in the United States among slaves until slavery ended.²¹

The independent Black Church retained a sense of its African identity. Founding leaders and adherents understood their cultural heritage and aligned themselves with it through various means. One way the new independent black churches aligned themselves with Africa was identifying and naming themselves. Black churches, denominations and organizations designated themselves as African (e. g., African Baptist Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Civilization Society, etc.).

African Traditional Religion

Leadership roles in the newly constituted independent black churches were based on African familial and tribal organization. Elders and community sanctioned leaders served as the locus of power and their authority in large part went unquestioned. These leaders were viewed as intermediaries between the people and God. Generally, the attributes of religion for Africans and their descendants were twofold. First, religion was not divorced from any sphere of life. Second, in order for religion to survive the trek across the Atlantic, slavocracy and oppressive conditions, it had to be adaptable. In prayer we see all aspects of an individual and community's life nurtured and attended. The Yoruba prayed at any time and at any

²¹Mechal Sobel contends Africanisms were transmitted to the New World by captured Africans and that tribal identity was maintained. He points specifically to valued work habits, attitudes, the form and style of dress, and language as ways Africans identified with one another. Because these traits were prevalent, Sobel asserts that the sacred cosmos of the African was transplanted in America. Of particular import was the fact that many Africans spoke multiple languages. Because of the preference of slave owners for a particular work ethic or disposition of his/her chattel, slaves with the same language and world view were kept together, thus sustaining an African social organization, albeit out of the ear shot of the master/driver. Trabelin' On, 29-31.)

place.²² That practice, adapted, transported and transplanted is now lodged in the Black Church and continues in the belief system of African Americans. Likewise, other African religious practices (e.g. spirit possession) and beliefs have been adapted and are resident in the diaspora.

The influence of African traditional religion/societies on education in the Black Church focuses on the establishment of the identity of the person in relation to his/her own community and in relation to God and the created order. Further, education is also focused on the preservation of the community, its traditions and values. The means by which this education is accomplished is through intergenerational education (storytelling, rituals, and the modeling of desired behavior). This education is intergenerational and in this context, the culture, history, and religion of the group is passed to successive generations. The result of the educational process is the holistic *formation* of persons in and the continuation of the traditions of their community. Tradition(al) is the first dimension of the educational model that I propose. This dimension will be explained later in the chapter.

Slave Religion/Community

Within slave religion/community the goal and purpose of education was the survival of the identity of the person in relation to her/his own community and in relation to the false identity laid upon the slave by the dominant society. Further, education was also focused on the creation of a new community out of the memories of an African past, the encounter with the rhetoric of freedom and nationalism, as well as an emphasis on human dignity. The means by which this education was accomplished is through the raising of the socio-political

²²Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 83.

consciousness of the individual through both oral and written texts. This education was also intergenerational, in this context the culture, history, and religion of the group adapted to novel situations. The result of the educational process was that persons and communities were *in-formed* by the challenges of new surroundings and life circumstances. Further, education focused on the illumination and demystification of the experience of slavery. This foundational stream contributes to my model of Christian education through its emphasis on the experiential dimension, that will be elaborated on in more detail later in the chapter.

Bible/Biblical Community

The Bible, based on an African American hermeneutic, has as its goal and purpose of education the creation of identity against the backdrop of non-identity. In what sense is the identity of the people of Israel and the early Christian community, both as persons and as a group, given to them as a consequence of God's choice of them? The means by which this education is accomplished is through the recovery of a past given shape by the providence of God and a future grounded in the promise of God. Prayer, ritual, proverbs, and other cultic acts are employed for this purpose. This education is intergenerational because it is founded on a people's history and hope, their past and their future. The result of the educational process is that persons and communities are *transformed*. Education in this sense is focused on the revelation of God and the redemptive transformation of God's people through storytelling and story-linking. The contribution of this stream to the proposed educational model is an emphasis on the redemptive power of sacred narratives.

Indigenous Black Religious Education Model (IBRE)

A Constructive proposal

To this point, I have introduced several concepts, propositions and theorists. I will now make linkages between the three foundational sources for the Black Church (African traditional religion, slave religion, and the Bible), and the work of the theorists (Shockley, Moseley, Wimberly, and Crockett) that were introduced in Chapter 1, as I engage in a constructive proposal for Christian education in the contemporary Black Church. Albert J. Raboteau in Slave Religion - The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South, substantiates the influence of the three streams in the life of the Black Church and the life of the black Christian. He writes

When . . . Africans were brought to slavery . . . they were torn away from the political, social, and cultural systems that had ordered their lives . . . In the New World slave control was based on the eradication of all forms of African culture because of their power to unify the slaves and thus enable them to resist or rebel. Nevertheless, African beliefs and customs persisted and were transmitted by slaves to their descendants. Shaped and modified by a new environment [slavery], elements of African folklore, music, language, and religion were transplanted in the New World by the African diaspora . . . One of the most durable and adaptable constituents of the slave's culture, linking African past with American present [slavery], was his religion. It is important to realize, however, that in the Americas the religions of Africa have not been merely preserved as static 'Africanisms' or as archaic 'retentions.' The fact is that they have continued to develop as living traditions putting down new roots in new soil, bearing new fruit as unique hybrids of American origin. African styles of worship, forms of ritual, systems of belief, and fundamental perspectives have remained vital on this side of the Atlantic, not because they were preserved in a 'pure' orthodoxy but because they were transformed. Adaptability, based upon respect for spiritual power wherever it originated, accounted for the openness of African religions to syncretism with other religious traditions and for the continuity of a distinctively African religious consciousness . . . the gods of Africa

continued to live - in exile.²³

The religion of enslaved Africans was enlivened and refashioned by their encounter with the Bible. The recorded history of Israel permitted slaves to keep

hope alive by incorporating as part of their mythic past the Old Testament exodus of Israel out of slavery. The appropriation of the Exodus story was for the slaves a way of articulating their sense of historical identity as a people. That identity was also based, of course, upon their common heritage of enslavement. The Christian slaves applied the Exodus story, whose end they knew, to their own experience of slavery, which had not ended. In identifying with the Exodus story, they created meaning and purpose out of the chaotic and senseless experience of slavery. Exodus functioned as an archetypal event for the slaves. The sacred history of God's liberation of his people would be or was being repeated in the American South . . . The story of Israel's exodus from Egypt helped make it possible for the slaves to project a future radically different from their present. From other parts of the Bible, especially the prophetic and apocalyptic books, the slaves drew descriptions which gave form and, thus, assurance to their anticipation of deliverance. The troublesome question [for the slave] had not been if the slaves would be free, but when.²⁴

The common thread that is inherent in the three foundational streams that inform and are thus indigenous to the Black Church is intergenerational education, where community is vital. James White, a religious educator, provides the most sustained discourse on intergenerational religious education. He defines it "as a learning experience where two or more different age groups of people in a religious community come together to learn, grow and live in faith through in-common experiences, parallel learning, contributive occasions, and

²³Raboteau, 4-5.

²⁴Ibid., 311, 312.

interactive sharing.”²⁵ White says that his definition “is both descriptive of the field and prescriptive for ways to proceed in the further development of intergenerational religious education.”²⁶ What this means is that in addition to describing intergenerational religious education, he provides insights on how this can be done through in-common experiences, parallel learning, contributive occasions, and interactive sharing.

An **in-common experience** is generally more observatory than verbal, represented by activities or experiences that participants can do at the same time regardless of age, such as watching a liturgical dance. In **parallel learning** situations, participants are separated by groups (age, interests, gender, office, etc.) to work on a project, topic or activity. At an appointed time the large group reassembles to debrief their small group experience. A church play would be an example of a project that incorporates parallel learning. A **contributive occasion** is related to parallel learning because it prolongs the debriefing process by allowing all participants the opportunity to contribute in an effort to better understand the activity or project, and each other. Working with the example of a church play, in the parallel learning situation actors, stage crew, ushers, lighting crew, sound crew and costume crew are separated to attend to their specific tasks. At rehearsal, the contributive occasion takes place in order to present a flawless presentation. During rehearsal, the big picture is talked about and each small group or individual is given an opportunity to voice her/his concerns, opinions and suggestions to make the production meaningful to each cast member and the audience. Finally, **interactive sharing** is a bonding experience, such as those that occur in activities

²⁵Ibid., 18.

²⁶White, 19.

such as sack races, fellowship dinners, fashion shows or sports. The intent is to cast people in a more accessible light by engaging in activities that decimate barriers that separate people from one another.²⁷

But how does this look in a congregation? This query will be dealt with by asking and answering a series of questions that are intended to provide practical guidance for a local congregation as they contemplate and plan Christian education in their respective setting.

Why is intergenerational religious education important?

The Yoruba say “the young cannot teach tradition to the old.” Conversely, tradition cannot continue unless it is accepted, appreciated and learned by successive generations of the young.

Walter Brueggeman, a biblical scholar, says,

education has to do with the maintenance of a community through the generations. This maintenance must assure enough continuity of vision, value, and perception so that the community sustains its self-identity. At the same time, such maintenance must assure enough freedom and novelty so that the community can survive in and be pertinent to new circumstances. Thus, education must attend both to process of continuity and discontinuity in order to avoid fossilizing into irrelevance on the one hand, and relativizing into disappearance on the other hand.²⁸

Brueggemann reminds us that education must be *relevant*. Learners make an investment in what they are learning. In order for their interests and imaginations to be fully invested, they must see their experience, interests and concerns reflected in meaningful ways. Additionally, successive generations must sense that their involvement is desired and indeed

²⁷White, 26-30.

²⁸Walter Brueggemann, The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 1.

essential. That is why George Koehler, a major contributor in the area of intergenerational religious education, emphasized that in intergenerational religious education “caring, and mutual responsibility for learning” are necessary between generations.²⁹

What constitutes a generation?

A generation can be conceived of in many ways, ranging from a few years in age difference to multiple development levels. The IBRE model is designed in such a way that multiple generations (age and developmental levels) will participate in learning events that are synchronized (same theme/topic but age/developmental stage specific) or experiences that are relevant regardless of age/developmental state (i.e., fellowship dinners).

What activities are appropriate in an intergenerational religious education setting?

The appropriateness of an activity should be assessed on a case by case basis as activities are being considered. Common sense and a knowledge of members of a congregation should guide who will be involved. If you are hosting a fellowship dinner, any age group can participate. However, if your activity is a movie, the contents of the movie would determine what age groups are appropriate.

What types of activities count as intergenerational religious education?

An activity does not have to come directly from the Bible in order to count as a religious/Christian education activity. What we are aiming for is adherence to the two great commandments when planning learning events; that you should love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and your neighbor as yourself. In an intergenerational religious education activity we are aiming at a closer relationship with God and neighbor. Therefore certain

²⁹George Koehler, cited in White, 19.

activities will be geared more toward nurturing a relationship with God, while others strengthen interpersonal relationships with neighbor. This means, that in an religious education activity, as I draw closer to my neighbor, I draw closer to God.

What is the most difficult part of setting up an intergenerational religious education activity?

Charles Foster, a religious educator, might help us understand what is involved in making an intergenerational religious education activity happen. He reminds us that intergenerational education is “a teaching-learning process in which all members give and receive from the experience.”³⁰ Here, process is key. Typically, learning events are developed for a specific age group or developmental level. When multiple age groups or developmental stages merge, the learning environment may become charged with excitement, disarray, uneasiness, and/or reticence. It takes time for people to bond. Some may never bond. Experimenting with different activities and groupings will facilitate the process. Hopefully as participants become comfortable with one another safe space is created. Additionally, there are learning activities and experiences best implemented in age specific settings. Finally, do not be discouraged if some people choose not to participate. Your bonded group may represent only a small segment of the congregation.

The Indigenous Black Religious Education (IBRE) Model is presented as, and intended to be, a flexible model capable of being fashioned to meet the specific needs of a given congregation. Although I label the model as flexible, its implementation must be intentional even though its use may not occur on a regular basis. This model may be

³⁰Foster, cited in White, 19.

incorporated as the sole model or one of several religious education models that a congregation uses in tandem with another curriculum or educational ministries undertaken through kerygma, diakonia, koimonia, or leiturgia. The model recognizes and honors the fact that religious education in most congregations is done by volunteer staff, many of whom are without formal training in curriculum development. Therefore, designing a curriculum that can be implemented at each church school gathering will be a creative process that is developed and implemented over a long period of time.

Traditional Dimension

When speaking of tradition, I am referring to “a cultural [practice] that was created by past generations and that, having been accepted and preserved in whole or in part, by successive generations, has been maintained to the present.”³¹ Tradition is not merely transmitted to or inherited by successive generations in the same way as eye color or height. It must be accepted and embraced by each generation. The maintenance of a tradition, in whole or in part is a voluntary act on the part of receivers.

How does a tradition survive from one generation to the next? For any tradition to survive, it must undergo intense scrutiny periodically by each generation. Upon close inspection and reflection, a tradition must be malleable, capable of adapting to contemporary norms.

The refinement or abandonment of a tradition and the need to revitalize it by adding on new elements are the consequences of two main factors: internal criticism of the tradition undertaken from time to time, and the adoption of worthwhile or appropriate nonindigenous

³¹Kwame Gyekye, Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 221.

(or, alien) ideas, values, and practices.³²

Changes to, or refinement of a tradition may occur if there are “encounters between an indigenous cultural tradition and an alien tradition.”³³ Such was the case when African traditional religion encountered Europeans at the time of capture and the slave trade, and when past religious traditions and practices encountered Christianity in the New World. With each encounter, the belief system and practices of African traditional religion underwent alteration in order to survive. Out of necessity, a new world view was forged by enslaved Africans as they extrapolated compatible elements found in a novel context. A primary element appropriated into the world view of enslaved Africans was their identification with the Hebrew people as found in the biblical record embraced by their captors. By appropriating the biblical record as their recorded history with God, several things were accomplished. First, Africans were able to maintain some of their indigenous beliefs and practices (one supreme God, respect for ancestors, spirit possession, and a life where all was subsumed under the cultic life). Second, a tool of survival and liberation was identified. The God that had sustained Israel could and would sustain and liberate them (enslaved Africans) from bondage. Third, by embracing the Christian practices and beliefs of their captors, a protective facade was erected. This means that slaves did not internalize the Bible as an oppressive device in the way their owners and their clergy intended.

What is meant by appropriating an element of a cultural tradition? It means accepting it, taking possession of it, and making it one's own. A once alien idea or value that has been accepted by a different

³²Ibid., 222.

³³Ibid., 224.

tradition as its own is one that will in time be meshed with the [non-indigenous] elements of that cultural tradition; that what was originally an alien cultural value will assume a new character utterly or almost utterly different from that which it may have had at the time of its adoption; and, in consequence, that it will lose its 'alienness' from the point of view of its recipients as it enters the indigenous cultural stream and blends with it.³⁴

It is no wonder that black Christians embrace the Bible with as much fervor as Jews embrace the Torah. The fervor of this embrace has not been without its challenges. Traditional African American Biblical interpretation has wrestled with portions of the New Testament which appear to support slavery and submission. Black interpreters have also sought a place for people of African descent within the Biblical drama. In spite of these challenges, African American Christians have found their story within the Biblical narratives. This is why the Bible and Christianity are inseparable from the history of black people in the United States.

In the IBRE model, the traditional dimension is concerned with transmitting cultural and Christian traditions to successive generations. In this paradigm, learners encounter themselves as part of the African diaspora that embraces Christianity. What has it meant in the lives and history of black people to be black? What does it mean to be Christian? Can blacks truly be Christian given the institutionalized church's complicity with oppression? The three foundational sources can contribute to the traditional domain practically, by considering and teaching "the whole complex of [African, slave and Christian] communal interactions embracing functions, roles, institutions, customs, norms, symbols, and the processes and networks distinctive to the systems of social organization (economic production, political

³⁴Ibid., 226.

order, military defense, judicatory procedure, religious organization, etc.).³⁵ However, these lessons from the learner's cultural and religious past (African, slave and Christian) represent "not only an opportunity of instruction, but [also] a moment of conflict,"³⁶ particularly if younger generations resist or rebel against the traditions of their elders.

Each foundational source should be examined in light of its contribution to the survival of black culture and Christian faith. It is a fallacy to assume that all black people embrace their blackness, or the Christian faith. The lessons and the summons to know and/or remember do more than transmit knowledge. They provide the space and opportunity for the exchange of generational differences in memories, experiences and commitments to surface. The lessons provide space for youth to question, and elders to respond. This intergenerational event is potentially one of bonding or separation as elders attempt to involve younger generations in the covenantal and cultural community of the future. Hopefully younger generation(s) move from *distemporaries* to contemporaries.³⁷ The commitment of elders becomes the commitment of the younger only if the tradition is accepted. The process of instilling continuity of commitment to the culture and to the faith in youth is poignantly illustrated in the following citations drawn from the three foundational sources.

The young cannot teach tradition to the old.³⁸

³⁵Norman K. Gottwald, ed., "Sociological Method in the Study of Ancient Israel, in The Bible and Liberation - Political and Social Hermeneutics, rev. ed., Norman Gottwald, ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 27.

³⁶Michael A. Fishbane, Text and Texture (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 79.

³⁷Ibid., 79-83.

³⁸Yoruba proverb.

And when your children say to you, What do you mean by this service? You shall say (Exodus 12:26)

And you shall tell your son on that day (Exodus 13:8)

And when in time to come your son asks you, What does this mean? you shall say to him (Exodus 13:14)

When your son asks you in time to come, What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord our God has commanded you? Then you shall say to your son (Deuteronomy 6:20-21)

. . . that this may be a sign among you, when your children ask in time to come, What do those stones mean to you? Then you shall tell them (Joshua 4:6)

When your children ask their fathers in time to come, What do these stones mean? then you shall let your children know (Joshua 4:21)³⁹

Let the first of January, the day of abolition of the slave trade in our country, be set apart in every year, as a day of publick thanksgiving for that mercy. Let the history of the sufferings of our brethren, and of their deliverance, descend by this means to our children to the remotest generations; and when they shall ask, in time to come, saying, What mean the lessons, the psalms, the prayers and the praises in the worship of this day? let us answer them, by saying, the Lord, on the day of which this is the anniversary, abolished the trade which dragged our fathers from their native country, and sold them as bondmen in the United States of America.⁴⁰

It is intimated in these citations that the young will be inquisitive about their history and the

³⁹Brueggeman, Creative Word, 14-15.

⁴⁰Absalom Jones, "Absalom Jones's Thanksgiving Sermon - 1 January 1909," in Dorothy Porter, Early Negro Writings, 1760-1837, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 339, cited in Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 83.

faith of their parents/ancestors. Further, when the children ask, it is the responsibility of the elders to provide an understanding of their history and belief system. What is to be done if the children do not ask of their ancestry or heritage? It is still the responsibility of elders to introduce younger generations to their cultural and Christian heritages with enticing accounts of its value. We are admonished to “train up a child in the way he/[she] should go: and when [they are] old, [they] will not depart from it.”⁴¹ Wimberly’s historical cultural approach to story-linking using scripture is but one way of introducing children to their cultural and Christian heritages. This approach capitalizes on biblical stories that find deposits in the life and heritage of African Americans.

According to Wimberly, there are at least five categories of choices in the historical cultural approach to story-linking, they are:

- ☒ Old Testament freedom stories
- ☒ Old Testament and New Testament counter freedom stories
- ☒ Old Testament declaration stories
- ☒ New Testament salvation story
- ☒ New Testament Christian life-style stories⁴²

An example of the historical cultural approach to story-linking in the form of freedom story is “Moses’ call and the freedom struggle of the Israelites, as told in Exod. 3:1-12, 14: 1-31.”⁴³ Here, “story linking [is] focused on interpersonal relations, life events, life meanings, and

⁴¹Prov. 22:6

⁴²Wimberly, 118.

⁴³Ibid, 119.

story plots.”⁴⁴ Cultural expressions in this approach may be the Negro spiritual “Go Down Moses,” or the historical account of watch night in the life of slaves and their descendants. As revelers gather on December 31st each year to ring in the new year, the descendants of African slaves gather in churches (mostly) and homes, watching and praying in the new year. This practice began on December 31, 1862. Slaves received the message that on January 1, 1863 they would be free, so they watched for and rejoiced at midnight on the night of December 31, 1862 as freedom came.

Additionally, the last citation clearly evidences the appropriation of Israel’s recorded history with God by black people in their experience of slavery in the United States as African descendants, which leads us to the next domain.

Experiential Dimension

Experience as defined by Webster’s Dictionary has to do with being directly affected by events that make up the conscious past of an individual or community. Because of something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through, reality is thereby reflected.⁴⁵ James Cone suggests that

the black experience is more than the so-called ‘church experience,’ more than singing, praying, and preaching about Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit. The other side of the black experience should not be rigidly defined as ‘secular,’ if by that term one means the classical Western distinction between secular and sacred, for it is not antireligious or even nonreligious. This side of the black experience is secular only to the extent that it is earthy and seldom uses God or Christianity as the chief symbols of its hopes and dreams. It is sacred because it is created out of the same historical community as the

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, s. v. “experience.”

church experience and thus represents the people's attempt to shape life and to live it according to their dreams and aspirations. Included in these black expressions are animal tales, tales of folk figures, slave seculars, blues, and accounts of personal experiences.⁴⁶

What Cone has done is what his African ancestors did, eliminate the distinction between the sacred and the secular. By detailing survival strategies employed by black people, Cone "centers on the ability of [black people] to survive in an environment of the strong and powerful."⁴⁷ When black people use the aforementioned expressions, particularly as they did in slavery, they "express the contradictions of existence while affirming the need to live in history without being conquered by it."⁴⁸

In the teaching of black religious education, the experiential dimension of the IBRE model is concerned with liberation and socio-political reality which is not separate from their religion. Religion cannot be extracted from the socio-political reality of black people because God is understood to be on the side of the oppressed and in control of history, bringing justice and equality.

It would be erroneous to think the black experience began with and is subsumed under chattel slavery. Had that been the case, liberation would never have been in the consciousness of black people. The will to be free came lodged in the memory and experience of the once free African, the continuity of that experience was existent in the slave community, and is now resident in the psyche of contemporary black people. According to John Dewey, "the

⁴⁶Cone, 23.

⁴⁷Ibid., 29.

⁴⁸Ibid.

principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after.”⁴⁹ While the experience of slavery was traumatic and served as an intense modifier of the African world view, the contemporary black person still maintains the Africans’ and slaves’ zeal for freedom along

with other Africanisms. The debate over cultural imprints, or as some label it, African retentions in slaves and their descendants, has continued since the Frazier/Herskovits exchange.

During the mid-twentieth century, E. Franklin Frazier and Melville J. Herskovits entered into a sustained debate that centered on African retentions, reflected in patterns of worship, belief systems and ritual, among African Americans. Frazier held that social cohesion, or the loss thereof, was the key to understanding the demise of African culture in the New World context. According to Frazier, African Americans in the United States did not retain any African tradition/culture in patterns of worship, belief systems or practices or rituals. Frazier, in The Negro Church in America, said the slave represented “tabula rasa” or a clean slate by the time s/he set foot on American soil because social cohesion had been destroyed. He cites several factors that contribute to this conclusion. First, he said initially the majority of enslaved Africans were male and that males are poor transmitters of cultural heritage. Second, he maintained that the manner in which enslaved Africans were held until they were transported to the New World impacted transmission of culture to the New World.

⁴⁹John Dewey, Experience and Education (New York: Simon and Schuster, Touchstone, 1997), 35.

His contention was, enslaved Africans held in dehumanizing quarters without regard for gender or tribal affiliation, made communication difficult at best. This pattern of disregard and destruction of social cohesion continued through the dehumanizing “Middle Passage”, where without regard for gender, enslaved Africans were constricted by being crowded in confined quarters. In instances, initial capture and the Middle Passage, enslaved Africans were under constant supervision, unable to communicate and separated if tribal affiliation was detected. Next, Frazier said that upon reaching the plantation, or workstation in America, the new slave was forced into an accommodating mode by existing social structures. This included being coerced by other slaves to adapt to their new way of life so as not to cause trouble for everyone (blacks) and they were forced to speak English. Finally, the primary African system, family and tribe was disrupted. Frazier concluded, Christianity provided the new basis for social cohesion and that structure was white in form and format, not African.

In his classic work, The Myth of the Negro Past, Herskovits’ aim was to dispel the myths that said the American Negro had no past of value because of the savagery of Africans, and that his ancestors had been saved from barbarism through their encounter with Europeans. For Herskovits, three factors influenced the lack of scholarly/secular knowledge of Africanisms posited in African Americans in the United States. First, he said research that looked at and compared Africans and African Americans for similarities in cultural patterns was faulty. The research was flawed he contended because the research population (American blacks) was too narrow. In order to label a practice as truly African, Herskovits argued that parts of the African Diaspora, dispersed through the New World due to the slave trade, should be included in the research in order to validate the practice. Second, Herskovits

claimed that present knowledge of Africanisms posited within African Americans in the United States was based on available literature. He said this research is flawed because it lacked adequate field notes that combined historical, demographic and comparative ethnographic data. Finally, Herskovits said it is erroneous to expect to find pure African practices among African Americans in the United States. Further, he advanced the position that while African Americans are not African, they are descendants of Africans and like every other group of immigrants, African Americans retain some cultural identity/heritage of their ancestors while accommodating themselves within their present historical context.

I side with Herskovits' claim that African Americans in the United States retain Africanisms. While each researcher (Frazier and Herskovits) make valid claims; they enter the discussion from two very distinct fields. Frazier, as a sociologist, looked for *pure* retentions, while Herskovits, and anthropologist, considered the *nuanced* features of cultural practices due to the accommodation mode in a new socio-historical context, such as codes of polite behavior. One example is respect for elders. My position rests on the adaptability of African traditional religion. This means, based on available literature written by Africans and other scholars in the field, African culture, including religion, has always accommodated change. In the IBRE model one teaches about the experiences of the foreparents before and after colonization, their encounter with Christianity, and the positive and negative affects of each encounter.

Borrowing from Grant Shockley's *Intentional Engagement Model*, the socio-political sub-component of the IBRE model combines social awareness with social analysis on the part of the black church as it provides religious education to its members and a viable presence in

the lived reality of black people. Shockley said that religious education must concern itself with social awareness which assists black people develop “a growing capacity to perceive the social, political, economic, and political conditions that oppress them daily.”⁵⁰ Through social analysis, Shockley was concerned that black people develop a “critical sense . . . [which fosters the] capacity to objectify or transcend specific situations.”⁵¹ In the similitude of the zeal for freedom by slaves, contemporary black people must not become so otherworldly that they are no earthly good. This means black people and the Black Church as a social change agent must be vigilant in attending to and protecting the marginalized. To do this effectively, the church and its members must be actively involved in social action, understanding that action flows from faith.

Transformational Dimension

In Chapter One I referred to Ann Wimberly’s assertion that human beings have the innate desire and biblical mandate to be free. Again, this freedom is not simply the absence of restrictions, but serves the purpose of doing something with one’s life. Thus, persons do not simply seek freedom to be, but freedom to do. In the transformational dimension, the task is *to do*, and the doing is to be a redemptive practice within the black church, black communities, and the world.

The IBRE model seeks to nurture people through Christian education. It is the intent of this model to bring about transformation in people through communal care and various intergenerational activities. The establishment of community will be developed on three

⁵⁰Shockley, 246.

⁵¹Ibid.

levels. The first will occur at the congregation level and focus on internal bonding based on care and mutuality. Second, the bonded group of the congregation, in whole or in part will seek avenues to bond with the broader community. Finally, the bonded group of the congregation, in whole or in part, will participate in activities that are intentional about global ministry in an effort to recognize that the kingdom of God is inclusive.

At each level of community, formation, care, and mutuality will be stressed. The underlying thought is that as one has received care from a community, there will be an urgency to share with the community. This is not a rose colored, pie-in-the-sky plan. It is hoped that every person through intervention can find him/herself in the community of God. The care and mutuality that this plan proposes goes beyond talking to living faithfully with each other, the community and in the world. Transformation will come through Christian education, involvement in social action and outreach based on active praxis of faith. Further, the redemptive and transformative power of God will be mediated through faith narratives articulated in the Bible and those of the gathered contemporary faith community.

CONCLUSION

The theorists, Shockely, Moseley, Wimberly, and Crockett, provided seminal concepts for the construction of a Christian educational model for the contemporary Black Church. Insights gleaned from these theorists highlighted the genius of the Black Church historically. To recap, Shockley's Intentional Engagement Model has six basic components. It involves *self-awareness*, which means that Christian education should teach people to regard themselves as subject rather than objects in their own history. It involves *social awareness*, which means that Christian education should bring the real issues and problems which affect

the community to the forefront in its teaching. It involves *social analysis*, which means that Christian education should assist persons in developing a critical eye through which to assess and transcend oppressive situations. It involves *transformation*, which means that concrete examples and models of liberated living ought to be part of the curriculum of black Christian education. It involves *praxis*, which means that persons are encouraged to engage in significant acts of resistance against oppression within their lives. Finally, it involves *the community* as the actual site of Christian education which means that Christian education is not confined to the sanctuary.

The *Intentional Engagement Model* proposed by Shockley encompasses the entire life and ministry of the church, which coincides with the five classical forms of the life of a church's education ministry. Christian education occurs through *koinonia* (communion and community, i.e., fellowship meals); *kerygma* (proclamation of the Word of God, i.e., preaching); *diakonia* (service and outreach, i.e., health fair); *leiturgia* (prayer and worship, i.e., worship service); and *didache* (teaching and learning, i.e., church school).⁵² I agree that the educational ministry of the Black Church must be concerned with the totality of life for a person, congregation and community. Therefore, holistic education must be engaged through all ministries of the church as Shockley's model suggests. However, the model I construct is concerned with *didache*. The didactic encounter is one of exchange between teacher and learner. In this exchange, the task of education is to instill or cultivate knowledge. It is expected that newly acquired knowledge will translate into a transforming praxis that

⁵²Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 43-44.

converges with the other movements (koinonia, kerygma, diakonia, and/or leiturgia) as Shockley suggests in the components that comprise his *Intentional Engagement Model*. The component of Shockley's model that contributes to the model to be constructed is his component of self-awareness. Through the didactic event, the proposal will be intentional about attending to individuals as persons beloved of God. Exposing them to and engaging them in their Christian and cultural heritages. In this component, Shockley's model corresponds to the experiential and transformational dimensions of the IBRE Model.

Moseley's contribution to the IBRE Model can be found in his emphasis on the importance of intergenerational encounters. Intergenerational encounters are manifested in each of the three foundational streams and provide the primary mechanism for transmitting faith and culture.

Wimberly's model "draws on the Christian education approaches initiated during the slavery era. It entails a teaching/learning process focused on liberation and vocation."⁵³ Wimberly labels this as the concept of story-linking. Story-linking is "a process whereby persons connect components of their everyday life stories with the Christian faith story found in Scripture,"⁵⁴ this process in didactic events "[help] persons to discern the liberating activity of God."⁵⁵ Wimberly's approach is directly related to the IBRE Model through the experiential and transformational dimensions as she provides concrete examples for employing the story-linking method to effectuate redemptive transformation in the lived reality of black

⁵³Wimberly, 13.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

experience.

Similarly, Crockett draws on scripture to recast the African-American experience and vice versa. He maintains that “for Christian education to be effective in African American communities, it must have cultural integrity with the African-American experiences and traditions . . . Christian education for the Black church involves, fundamentally, processes of teaching scripture in light of the experiences and traditions of African Americans.”⁵⁶ Crockett connects to the IBRE Model through the traditional, experiential and transformation dimensions.

⁵⁶Crockett, xiii.

CHAPTER 6
ST. LUKE TABERNACLE
AN EXPERIMENT WITH THE
INDIGENOUS BLACK RELIGIOUS EDUCATION MODEL

Church and Community Overview

St. Luke Tabernacle is located in Rochester, New York, in the western portion of the state known as the Genesee Valley region. Incorporated on March 21, 1817,¹ Rochester's present population is 214,470.² St. Luke is aligned with two denominational bodies, the American Baptist Churches, U. S. A.(a multi-ethnic denomination), and the Progressive National Baptist Convention (a historically black denomination). St. Luke Tabernacle is currently housed in the facility of Baptist Temple, a predominantly white American Baptist church. The church is located on the east side of the city, easily accessible by public transportation, surface streets and I490.

Housing in the immediate area of St. Luke (five mile radius) is diverse, ranging from stately mansions to upscale apartments, condominiums and single family dwellings. The cornerstone of the community is the George Eastman Estate. The housing, regardless to the

¹Blake McKelvey, Rochester on the Genesee: The Growth of a City (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 12.

²Laurel, Mississippi, "Homepage", available from <http://www.laurelms.com/>; Internet; accessed 13 September 00.

category is immaculate although age has taken a toll, and upkeep is costly. It is noteworthy to mention that very few of the mansions are still occupied by descendants of the original owners. In many instances, mansions are now occupied by businesses, religious groups, or have been modified, becoming rental properties with multiple tenants. Neighborhood residents are predominately white (98%), and their economic status is upper income. Employment opportunities within the neighborhood are those groups/businesses that have assumed residency in mansions, otherwise, the neighborhood is strictly residential, with no fast food chains, grocery stores or retail center. The school system (Brighton) is highly academic, having one of the best track records in the state of sending graduates to ivy league colleges and universities. There are also two private academies and three country clubs in the immediate vicinity.

With transportation, any part of the city can be reached within 20-25 minutes, even during rush hour. There is public transportation (buses) and employment opportunities outside the church's neighborhood are primarily in education, manufacturing, and health care. In and around Rochester, there are seven institutions of higher education. The city also serves as corporate headquarters to Kodak, Bausch & Lomb, Paychec, and Xerox.

Founded in 2000, St. Luke has approximately 100 members, most of whom are actively involved and attend regularly. Approximately 30% of the active members are youth and the membership and pastor are black. The founding pastor, Rev. Dr. James H. Evans, Jr., holds a Ph. D. in Systematic Theology from Union Theological Seminary in New York.

In the Introduction I stated that the problem being examined in this dissertation is the crisis posed by the pervasive, spirit-eroding nihilism present within the black community.

Nihilism is not new. The manifestations of nihilism present themselves differently in different generations as can be seen through the three foundational streams to the Black Church.

Nihilism in African traditional religion presents itself as chaos and is embedded in individual and communal forgetfulness. Education in this environment had as its goal the tradition of remembering through intergenerational practices and rituals.

During the slavery era, nihilism was inflicted on black people in the form of creating a class of non-beings through social, religious, and legislative actions. Religious education during that era concerned itself with self-affirmation by considering the experiential reality of black people and validating that experience.

Idolatry was the nihilistic threat to the biblical community. Idolatry was made manifest through the forgetfulness of God's people. They forgot and replaced God with things and people that were not gods and they forgot justice. Escape from nihilism for the biblical faith community came through their remembrance of the God of Israel and by practicing justice. Redemptive transformation took place in remembering.

Today, nihilism is manifested through a lack of knowledge about God, self-destructive behavior, and the flagrant acting out of injustice. Nihilism is not limited to African Americans or to the poor. St. Luke Tabernacle, in its Christian education programming is intentional about attending to nihilism in the community where it is located. The church did not locate itself on the west side of the city because that section of town is saturated with dozens of black churches that still fail to reach all the un-churched. Further, the west side is inundated with all manner of vice that accompanies economically challenged neighborhoods. It was the desire of the pastor and founding members to present an alternate environment for

congregants. An environment where the streets are clean, houses are well manicured and where the surroundings provide some degree of security. All this notwithstanding, there is no naivete on the part of the congregation. However subtle, nihilism presents itself. In our present setting, nihilism is present in the form of racism and concealed drug and alcohol addiction. Nonetheless, the community the church has elected to locate in is in need of the good news of Jesus Christ just as church members are entitled to alternate ways of living and worshiping. The transformational dimension of the IBRE Model is operative for both the congregation and the neighborhood in which it is located

Description of the Indigenous Black Religious Education Model (IBRE)

at St. Luke Tabernacle

The IBRE model at St. Luke Tabernacle is intentional about continually incorporating the three foundational streams (African traditional religion, slave religion/community, Bible) into its Christian education curriculum. Through conversations between the pastor and minister/director of the Christian education department of St. Luke, a conscious decision was made not to use mass produced curriculum initially for Christian education. Because mass produced curricula are not contextual, refashioning them in the IBRE model with a focus on the three foundational streams would be too labor intensive given the busy lives of volunteer staff. Other precipitating factors that led to this decision were:

1. The unique opportunity to start and customize a Christian education program from ground zero.
2. The reality that members (organizing and those to come) would not necessarily be on the same Christian educational level, warranted foundational or introductory courses and activities.

3. The desire to design a Christian education program where the Bible is central.
4. The need for Christian education program that elucidates historical elements:
 - a. Church history, highlighting the contribution and manifestation(s) of black peoples through the centuries.
 - b. Christian education programming that highlights the Black Church tradition and black culture along with cultural practices that can be traced to African heritage.
5. The requirement that Christian education that is holistic, taking into account mind, body and spirit, and the need to attend to all facets of human existence (social, religious, economic, political, etc.).

The writer serves as the minister/director of Christian education at St. Luke, and is responsible for organizing the Christian education department/ministry. The steps taken to organize the department/ministry are listed below, along with a discussion on the procedures that govern the tasks (See Appendix D for samples of organizational materials). Inasmuch as St. Luke shares worship space with a sister church, it became necessary to identify a day of the week to routinely hold Christian education classes that did not conflict with the host congregation. The schedule for the worship service of the host congregation (Sunday mornings) required that our service be held early afternoon (12:30 PM). Further, the host congregation holds Sunday school after their morning worship, making it necessary for us to hold church school at an alternate time because holding it after the worship service would be too long and taxing for parishioners. Our preference was Friday night rather than mid-week because children and parents would not have to get up early for school and work respectively the next morning. Further, Friday nights provides an alternative to church youth and their friends over and against options that might find them in less than desirable outings. Friday

nights also provided family time given the hustle and bustle of a busy week for children and adults. All Christian education sessions will be two hours (7:00 - 9:00 PM), unless otherwise specified.

I. Making choice of, and designing the Christian education curriculum

St. Luke Tabernacle, as stated earlier, is a new Christian fellowship. Its members consists both of people who have and have not been members of a church body in the past. However, none of the members or ministerial staff, including the pastor, have the experience of being a part of a church from its conception to inception. This fact alone provided fertile beginnings for a Christian education program.

When designing the Christian education program of St. Luke, the gifts and talents of the congregation and ministerial team was taken into consideration. The pastor decided that all ministries would fall under the auspices of clergy. Therefore, assessing the gifts and talents of the staff started with the ministerial team. The ministerial team of seven is an unusually gifted group, consisting of: one Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, one Ph.D. candidate in Christian Education, one Ph.D. student in Guidance and Counseling, one D. Min. in Pastoral Counseling, one attorney, one nurse practitioner, and one public relations specialist. With this cadre of professionals, we set about designing a Christian Education department/ministry that will continually incorporate the three foundational sources by drawing on the expertise of the staff and congregation.

Because St. Luke is a new Christian fellowship, we sought to exploit this opportunity by introducing all Christian education students to the same foundational information. Initially, Christian education classes would include the subjects of: Bible, Disciplines of the Spirit,

Church History, The Historical Role of the Bible in the African American Experience, and The Role of Africa in the Development and Spread of Christianity. The pastor and director of Christian education recognized and agreed that as a Christian fellowship, scripture was the keystone for Christian education. Additionally, members and visitors alike made inquiry as to when Bible study would begin, indicative of the primacy of the Bible in the Black Church tradition. It was not enough to offer new members, some churched for the first time, others at different stages of faith maturation, Bible study without a way to strengthen their faith journey with God and neighbor by building relationships. We developed a schema that consists of four cycles, ten weeks per cycle.

Cycle I includes both theoretical and practical arms, and at its conclusion it will become the New Member Course. The theoretical arm is a Survey of the Bible, exposing students (members and visitors) to an overview of the Bible thematically arranged. We are aware that the approach is an elementary form of Bible study, but we wanted to ensure that students new to biblical studies would get acquainted with the text and not be intimidated by more rigorous studies. Additionally, we were of the opinion that even the most erudite Bible student would learn something new. The practical arm of Cycle I centers on Disciplines of the Spirit. Here, we deal with spiritual practices and disciplines that aid us in the living out of, or maturation of our faith as we seek to develop a closer relationship with God and neighbor. Appendix C for an outline of Cycle I.

II. Recruiting a volunteer staff

As the director of Christian education I made a unilateral decision to use the ministerial staff as class facilitators in Cycle I. I was also keenly aware however, that there

were others in the congregation who saw their ministry in Christian Education. During Sunday worship services, an announcement was made to the congregation that anyone interested in working in the Christian Education Department should sign up. This was a disconcerting venture because we were not using mass produced curricula and I was not sure that I could come up with creative ways for people to utilize their skills. As volunteers signed up, I spoke with them one-on-one to ascertain where their interests lie. After recruiting volunteers, the Christian Education Department has been divided into three broad categories, each of which has a coordinator with staff. The divisions are: religious education, fellowship dinners, and special events. Religious education covers all didactic exchanges on topics related to the Bible, faith development, spirituality, church history, and worship.

Early on we were committed to regular fellowship opportunities. I suggested that we hold monthly fellowship dinners incorporating Christian education elements, and that people born in any given month be responsible for the fellowship meal and the Christian education activity. My suggestion was approved and fellowship dinners were placed under the rubric of the Christian Education Department. The coordinator is responsible for oversight of the fellowship hall, assigning fees for functions, and assisting in the development of the Christian education activity in conjunction with a team representing each month of the calendar year. In addition to fellowship, more people are actively involved in Christian education activities, planning and participation.

Special events coordinates all other educational programming not mentioned above in conjunction with ministers/directors of other church ministries. Additionally, the coordinator of special events plans non-religious courses in an effort to attend to the

articulated or observed needs of the congregation. Further, the coordinator and staff are responsible for coordinating and contracting for all multi-media equipment and the church newsletter. Examples of the types of sessions conducted by the Special Events Division is an end-of-the-cycle program that we have entitled: Christian Education through Fellowship which includes a meal, movie and moments of sharing. The moments of sharing is intended to provide opportunities to interpret and discuss popular films from a Christian perspective.

III. Identifying fee-for-services consultants for specialized classes

As gifted as the ministerial staff and congregation are, they cannot do everything. Therefore, specialized services and instructors will be required. In these instances, we will look beyond the membership to the community, drawing on the expertise of persons in the field of need. This may include tax/budget specialists, artists from various disciplines, financial investors, housing specialists, biblical scholars, etc.

IV. Training staff

Staff who have teaching responsibilities will be trained prior to each cycle. To ensure that all staff are adequately prepared, two training dates will be established. Training will focus on developing goals and objectives, and the content of a given lesson. Further, teaching staff are responsible for submitting their lessons plans at least two weeks in advance of their class to ensure its theological resonance with that of St. Luke Tabernacle. The training session will last two hours (see Christian Education Staff Training Manual: Appendix B).

V. Working collaboratively with other ministries of the church

As stated earlier, the Christian Education Department will work in collaboration with other ministries/departments to create didactic opportunities that prepare members and non-

member for participation in a specific area. For example, as the Mission Department prepares to support an international mission in Africa, the Christian Education Department will assist by offering a class on the topic of missionization, its impact on the spread of Christianity, and its function as Christian stewardship. If a Christian Education Department staff person travels on the mission, the role of that person in actions ceases being a didactic, educational (classroom) experience, and becomes mission work.

VI. Attending to the administrative function(s) of the department/ministry

A. Budget/Fund raising for special Christian education events

The monies allotted for the Christian Education Department is generated from the general treasury on a monthly basis. These funds will be used to buy or duplicate materials for all classes.

Fund raising applies to fellowship dinners and special events that involve meals or special materials for students. Members will be assessed according to their age for the purpose of fellowship dinners (i.e., if I will be 26 on my birthday in February, I will pay \$26.00). We are anticipating that there will be excess funds generated by these monthly events. After expenditures (decorations, food, educational programming materials and supplies), funds will go into the general treasury to be designated for monthly fellowship dinners. Likewise, for special events that involve meals and/or special materials for students, a fee will be assessed. In this instance, we do not expect there to be excess revenue.

B. Equipment and supplies

All equipment and supplies not owned by St. Luke will be secured by the Coordinator of Special Events and funds will be taken from the Christian Education Department budget.

C. Designations of classroom space

Classroom space/furnishings will be assigned according to class size and developmental stage.

D. Assessing/assigning age level appropriateness for all activities/sessions

A team of education specialists (principal, teachers, college students majoring in education in multiple age populations) will assess the age levels of congregants and divide classes into age appropriate/development level groupings. Further, this team is responsible for adapting approved adult lessons for different age groups. All teachers are to submit lesson plans to this team of specialists at least two weeks before their class begins.

E. Developing a departmental calendar in concert with other departments and church events

A departmental calendar will be formulated, taking into account the four cycles, fellowship dinners and special events. Scheduling will be coordinated with St. Luke's Secretary who maintains the church's calendar in coordination with the host congregation.

In most cases, fellowship dinners will be held the last Friday of each month. The exception to that is based on holiday scheduling.

Special events that involve movies or other artistic renderings will convene from 6:30 - 9:30 PM, rather than 7:00 - 9:00 PM.

F. Evaluation

Aside from evaluating each class and activity, the Christian Education Department/Ministry will be assessed to insure that the needs of members are being met. Adjustments will be made to programming based on evaluations received from participants and departmental staff.

In Chapter 5, drawing on the work of James White, different types of intergenerational interactions were discussed. These interactions included in-common experiences, parallel learning, contributive occasions, and interactive sharing. The Christian Education Department of St. Luke is intent on creating these types of learning situations. Further, in the spirit of African traditional religion, we will look for the close relationship between the sacred and the secular, for every educational event will flow from the perspective that God is concerned with mind, body and soul. The following examples demonstrate how St. Luke attends to the types

of intergenerational education.

In-common Experiences: As a special event, karate classes will be offered to all age groups that are physically able to participate.

Parallel Learning: This occurs during religious education programming. Students of all ages will engage in the same topic according to their age level.

Contributive Occasion: At the end of classes, groups will reconvene to discuss by age group, the focus of their lesson. For instance, the topic for the evening for adults may be the canon, specifically the five books of the Law/Torah/Pentateuch. Children may simply learn the names of the five books.

Interactive Sharing: This will take place during fellowship dinners as members and visitors share a meal and interact amongst themselves.

IBRE, like every effective educational enterprise, is an ongoing adaptive process where learners and teachers come together seeking connection and common ground. As Christian education, IBRE is firmly rooted in the faith of a community centered in Jesus Christ as manifested in the Bible. As black religious education, it respects and pays homage to the indigenous cultural, social, political, and historical experience of people of African descent. As intergenerational education, it recognizes its obligation to pass on wisdom from elders to the young. As education it is that collection of human activities which constantly seeks the truth, knowing that only the truth can set a people free.

CONCLUSION

The black community in the United States is experiencing a spirit-eroding nihilism which manifests itself as rampant violence, voracious consumerism, drug use that has reached epidemic proportions, disintegrating family structures, and swollen jail populations. As a Christian educator in the Black Church tradition, the starting point for my reflection and inquiry into solutions that combat nihilism is the Bible.

Judges 2:10 states, “and also all that generation were gathered unto their [ancestors]: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which [God] had done for Israel.” It is intimated in this text that there existed a generation of Israelites who had no relationship with God, nor did they have any recollection of what God had done on behalf of their people. How had the Israelites come to think of themselves? The Israelites lived in the midst of cultures whose gods and religions were different. The Bible speaks of the constant temptation of Israel to pursue other gods and to engage in religious practices which corrupted their true identity. Thus, Israel was tempted to sensuousness, the establishment and worship of idols made of precious metals, and the pursuit of foreign social and personal values. What Israel experienced then is similar to what the black community is facing today; that is, the temptation to embrace strange and ultimately harmful social and personal values and practices. This is the essence of what I have referred to as nihilism in the black

community.

The purpose of this study has been to focus attention on this problem and to ask “how can Christian education in the Black Church be constructed to combat nihilism that has come about as a result of cultural and religious forgetfulness?” To answer this question I have examined the state of Black Christian education through the lens of four major thinkers noting that the models presented had significant strengths. Yet, I argued, a more comprehensive model of Christian education in the Black church can be developed.

The model I constructed, the Indigenous Black Religious Education (IBRE) Model, emerges from the maxim, “the way out is back through.”* To combat nihilism in the black community, I suggest that the contemporary Black Church look to antecedents lodged in its history, namely, African traditional religion, slave religion, and the Bible, all of which I contend contributed to the formation of the historic Black Church. Upon close analysis, two recurring themes ran through the foundational sources; intergenerational education and community. Therefore, I have argued that generations of black people in the United States have forgotten, or know nothing of God because they are no longer part of a nurturing, intergenerational community that sees itself in relationship with each other and with God.

The IBRE model is based on a return to indigenous values and practices lodged in the formative construct of the Black Church. The way out of the nihilism which assaults

*Motto developed by Rev. Johnny R. Youngblood, Pastor, St. Paul Community Church, Brooklyn, New York.

the black community is to return to our past, gleaning the strengths that have seen us through hard times and cruel treatment. This model, using an intergenerational context, provides a structure by which Christian education in the Black church can be revitalized and further equipped to address the problems of our times. In this model people are transformed in two specific ways. First, one becomes self aware. The model, through intergenerational interactions, introduces learners and teachers in a local congregation to their cultural and religious heritages in an atmosphere of care and mutuality. Here, a positive self-consciousness is fostered. Second, after undergoing a transformation, members of a local congregation, as a result of coming to understand how social agency is a witness of their faith, will go into the community compelled by the gospel to transform their community and the world in which they live.

Appendix A
St. Paul United Methodist Church

St. Paul UMC

Activity	Sessions	Goal of Session/Activity
<p>Introduce group member to each other and the goals of the project.</p> <p>Establish group rules and form covenant.</p> <p>Establish format for sessions.</p>	1-2	<p>To introduce group members to one another and the intent/goals of the project.</p> <p>To encourage ownership of the project to group members by establishing the rules that govern the group process.</p>
<p>Through discussion and activities, explore spiritual and cultural traditions of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. African traditional religion and culture 2. Biblical faith communities 3. Contemporary society 	3-7	<p>To connect faith and cultural communities of the past with contemporary faith and cultural practices. To provide safe space for group members to discuss interpretations and expressions of faith and culture. Entry point for earnest intergenerational dialogue.</p>
Introduce, discuss and participate in spiritual practices and disciplines.	8-24	To explore spiritual practices and disciplines by incorporating classical and contemporary mediums.
Commit to staying in touch (weekly) with two group members from different age groups who are not relatives.	Ongoing	To become intentional about intergenerational communication.
Fellowship meals	Ongoing	Fellowship/dialogue opportunities.
<p>Field Trips</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Flowood River Plantation 2. Civil Rights Museum 3. Attend worship service of different faith tradition 4. Amusement park 	Weekends following sessions 10-22	<p>To provide alternate venues for observing and exploring different reactions to experiential encounters. Followed by dialogue in an effort to understand how individuals and groups synthesize information/experiences to form opinions. Bridge to understanding and tolerance.</p>
Volunteer for community and social action project.	Ongoing after session 12	To expose/introduce faith and culture of African American Christians to the broader community in an effort to establish linkages and concern within the community.
Continue intergenerational group after Phase I ends, expanding further into community outreach and mutuality.	Following session 24	Commitment to the process of intergenerational, community and multi-cultural dialogue.

Evaluation

Activities	Goal of Session/Activity	Outcome
<p>Introduce group members to each other and the goal/methods of the project.</p> <p>Establish group rules and form as a covenant group.</p> <p>Establish format and order of sessions.</p>	<p>To introduce group members to one another and the intent, goal and methods of the project.</p> <p>To encourage ownership of the project by group members through the establishment of rules that govern the group process.</p>	<p>Group members were introduced to one another and the goal of the project. Having materials (books, journals, pens, etc.) made participants feel that they were part of a professional setting, being taken seriously, so did having a voice in the planning of sessions and activities.</p> <p>The concept of a covenant group was new for most participants. However, they felt the work of the group was important and they were willing to commit to being present and listen to all participants. Everyone admitted that there had been occasions when communicating with another generation was difficult, in fact, often too difficult to deal with.</p> <p>To my surprise, when I asked if anyone would like to lead or help lead sessions, several group members volunteered. As the project progressed, most participants played leadership roles.</p>
<p>Through discussion and activities, explore spiritual and cultural traditions of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Biblical faith community Slave or Civil Rights Movement era Contemporary society (personal dimension of spirituality) 	<p>To connect faith and cultural communities of the past with contemporary faith and cultural practices.</p> <p>To provide safe space for group members to discuss personal and communal interpretations and expressions of faith and culture.</p> <p>An entry point for earnest intergenerational dialogue.</p>	<p>When discussing or engaged in activities that concentrated on biblical faith communities, slavery or the Civil Rights Movement, communication was smooth and most group members held similar views. Teenagers were out of touch with their history. They knew about slavery but black figures/history other than Martin Luther King, Jr., were foreign to them. They knew of him primarily because of the holiday. A void exists between slavery and their contemporary world. While watching movies, talking about or visiting the Civil Rights Museum, youth did not understand the concept of Jim Crowism or why it was allowed to exist considering the abolition of slavery. Many of the older participants did not know their church/denominational</p>

Evaluation

Activities	Goal of Session/Activity	Outcome
		<p>history. An example of this is the existence of the Central Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church. All participants and leaders realized and admitted that we were woefully ignorant of our cultural heritage, partly due to the educational system, partly due to apathy. I think each of us was challenged to delve deeper into our history to uncover more of its richness and shadows.</p> <p>When we entered dialogue on contemporary practices in religion/Christianity/culture, teenagers clammed up. With some coaxing and reluctance, youth said that Christianity as practiced by their church and parents did not address "real" issues and lives. They were told and expected to be "good" without question or exception. Youth said being good was hard given peer pressure, school expectations and family chaos. Further, no practical tools were provided to help them "be good". The most helpful method of providing advice came through working outside family units. Youth said other adults were more willing to listen to what they had to say and didn't yelled as much as their parents. What teenagers said did challenge parents to improve listening skills and tolerance. The difficulties encounter by youth was heard for the first time by many parents. Grandparents seemed to have known more about their struggles.</p> <p>This discussion (relevance of Christianity and the church to contemporary reality) crossed multiple topics/sessions and resurfaced during outings and became more accentuated when viewing videos or listening to music as stated earlier.</p> <p>When placed in respectful space, dialogue occurred, albeit heated and cut off at times. The</p>

Evaluation		
Activities	Goal of Session/Activity	Outcome
		dynamic of having a child respectfully challenge his/her parents/elders was interesting but no more than watching adults listen and take youth seriously. The most moving scenes involved participants from different age groups coming to the defense of another age group. Generally, this occurred when at least one generation separated those involved.
Introduce, discuss and participate in spiritual practices and disciplines.	To explore spiritual practices and disciplines by incorporating traditional and contemporary mediums.	<p>At the outset, group participants were asked to help develop sessions. The specific task was to identify practices that strengthen or develop a mature spiritual life. The group identified the following practices as those that developed spiritual discipline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Stewardship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tithes 2. Offering 3. Time 4. Talent 5. Assembly (church attendance) b. Scripture Reading c. Prayer d. Fasting e. Sacred Songs f. Looking for the sacred in the ordinary g. Journaling h. Caring for the "other"

Evaluation		
Activities	Goal of Session/Activity	Outcome
		<p>With the exception of journaling, sessions were held that covered each spiritual discipline and/or practice. Journaling crossed all sessions and was to become a daily discipline. Although everyone liked the idea and got better at the task, initially, many lacked the discipline. Additionally, many of the group members had a hard time believing the events of their life were worth writing about. Toward the end of the project, almost everyone was able to track substantial growth. Jay (preschooler) used his journal to draw.</p> <p>It was in these sessions that all participants became active. Whether participants led sessions or not, they prided themselves on teamwork, helping others succeed. Group members were eager for leaders to be successful in their presentation.</p> <p>The discipline that received the most complaints was fasting. Ironically, I was the only person willing to lead the session. Everyone participated in the activity and gave up different things for different periods of time; we chose from things that we each liked. Things other than food were initially given up. We gave up food only once and for a half day (your favorite meal).</p> <p>The most popular disciplines were: prayer and gospel/spiritual music for the older members and music and videos for the younger ones. Their (youth) taste in music was more eclectic than their adult counterparts but tended to lean toward rap/pop. The group found more sacred about "kids" music than the adults had previously noticed.</p>

Evaluation		
Activities	Goal of Session/Activity	Outcome
		The preschooler reminded everyone of the wonder of nature (lighting bugs) and play.
Fellowship through potluck supper(s).	Fellowship/dialogue opportunities.	<p>Potluck supper(s) did not materialize in terms of full means because sessions were held just after the dinner hour. Snacks were provided on a rotating basis with different groups of participants bringing foodstuff.</p> <p>We did share meals during field trips. The exciting thing about sharing food is that barriers come down. We sat and ate as family without grouping ourselves according to age or family unit(s).</p>
<p>Field Trips</p> <p>a. Civil Rights Museum</p> <p>b. Amusement Park</p> <p>c. Attend worship service of a different denomination</p>	<p>To provide alternate venues for observing and exploring different reactions to experiential encounters followed by dialogue, in an effort to understand how individuals and groups synthesize information/experiences to form opinions.</p> <p>Serves as a bridge to understanding and tolerance.</p>	<p>Excursions were modified to accommodate scheduling conflicts of group members and budgetary constraints.</p> <p>We travelled (using the church bus) to Atlanta to visit the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolence and Six Flags. We also toured the city, stopping at "The Dump" (Margaret Mitchell's refurbished home) and the Carter Center.</p> <p>When reflecting on the trip to Six Flags, we mused over who was afraid to ride what and we all breathed a sigh of relief when Mrs. Bounds (Jay's great grandmother) lived through a water ride. Conversation about the other sites was more serious and different members added insights that others may have missed or were less impacted by. That exchange was insightful. A different level of communication surfaced after we experienced each other having fun.</p>

Evaluation		
Activities	Goal of Session/Activity	Outcome
		<p>The trip to Birmingham was scheduled at a time when large numbers of people were working, but each family sent representatives. We visited the Civil Rights Museum and the 16th Street Baptist Church and had soul food afterwards.</p> <p>Reflection following and during visits to Civil Rights related sites was always solemn, leaving youth and adults with unanswered questions about our inhumanity toward one another.</p> <p>Various group members attended worship service at a church that had different denominational ties than their own. They reported that the order of services varied slightly but the elements of the services were similar. For the most part, they were unable to decipher creedal differences which led to a discussion on why so many denominations exist.</p>
Volunteer: community/social action project.	To provide opportunities to participate in settings that aid others outside the church or family unit.	This activity was not actualized by the group. However, various group members participate regularly in volunteer capacities.

Group Evaluation

Postive Aspects of the Project	Areas of Improvement	Elements that could Enhance the Project	Theories: What are the emcumberances/frustration of communicating with different generations? What are the benefits of intergenerational dialogue and how can it be accomplished?
<p>Learned new things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Portions of the Bible that were unfamiliar. 2. The meaning and strength of covenantal relationships. 	<p>I would like to have had more people from other denominations and other religions.</p> <p>More people should be told about this kind of project and invited to participate.</p> <p>Getting people to commit to long term projects.</p>	<p>Funding.</p> <p>Bring in folks from the community.</p> <p>Longer time, days not the length of each session.</p> <p>Provide dinner.</p> <p>Have class equal. As many men as women and youth.</p> <p>Include people of other races so they can see how the Black church and faith work. Maybe if they understood what we been through they could appreciate the way we are. If someone try to understand me, I will try to understand them. I get tired of living in two worlds, my own and other folk. Don't seem like nobody willing to live in my world. The song is right, everybody wanna sing my blues but don't nobody wanna live em.</p>	<p>Different age groups are naturally interested in different things.</p> <p>Interests clash.</p> <p>We communicate differently. Our words aren't the same.</p> <p>I can't express myself without being yelled at.</p> <p>My mama thinks and treats me like a baby. The only thing she says to me that's grown up is --- don't let boys under your dress. All they want is sex, then they'll leave you and talk about you. We never discuss anything and talking about sex is OUT!</p> <p>We can't talk about sex because we were not talked too about sex. It (sex) was never associated with anything other than biology and an obligation women fulfilled when they get married. "Good" girls didn't have sex before they were married.</p> <p>Being open about all kinda topics is hard. I am thankful for the group cause maybe my child can go talk to somebody I trust now to get answers or just talk bout stuff I am not comfortable with. I expect the</p>
<p>Journaling</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Allows me to slow down and compose my thoughts. 2. My life is interesting and fuller than I realized. 3. Develops discipline. 4. Allows me to track my growth in many ways. 5. Improves my writing and spelling. 6. It's confidential. I can write what I can't say. 7. It's a source of spiritual reflection and consolation. 8. A place to write secrets. 9. A way to express anger and other emotions without being punished. 	<p>The areas of improvement are not with the project but each of us. Realizing we have a long way to go in trying to get along with others, even our own family.</p> <p>Learned more about civil rights, role of education, religion.</p> <p>Schedule field trips when more people can go.</p> <p>Visit more historic sites.</p> <p>Find a better time to hold sessions. At 7:00 PM, I'd like to be settling in. I know working with a group of folk make it hard to meet everybody's needs.</p>		

Group Evaluation

Postive Aspects of the Project	Areas of Improvement	Elements that could Enhance the Project	<p>Theories:</p> <p>What are the emcumberances/frustration of communicating with different generations? What are the benefits of intergenerational dialogue and how can it be accomplished?</p>
<p>Scripture</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Finding and applying texts to life experiences/reality. 2. All activities were supported by scripture. 3. Helps with journaling (Upper Room). It's a reminder of God's presence with us and a source of insight. 			<p>to tell me about the things that concern my child, especially if danger is involved.</p> <p>Chullin is smarter now than dey wuz whe I wuz raised. Most of the thangs they tal about is strange to me but they understand love and if you just stick with em, thangs will be alright soona or later.</p> <p>It's good to communicate with other generations because reality exists outside ones own small world. If we fail to communicate with our elders and youth, parts of our heritage will be lost. More importantly, parts of our future will be alienated.</p> <p>We can do it if we try. God knows, trying to talk between generations is hard work. Some time, I feel like screaming and other times I have had to walk away and come back after praying.</p> <p>We're never going to understand everything. What's important is that we attempt to hear and are present for people.</p>
<p>Prayer</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I learned that learning to pray, like salvation was a process. I use to be concerned that my prayers were too short or the words weren't right. Now, I rely on the Spirit to help me. 2. Before the session on prayer, I never knew there were so many types of prayer. It was helpful to know how to pray an appropriate prayer. 3. The pattern of ACTS; adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication, help me to think about how to pray. The reassurance that there's no right way to pray also helped me not to get too scared to pray or hung up on a pattern. 			

Group Evaluation

Positive Aspects of the Project	Areas of Improvement	Elements that could Enhance the Project	Theories: What are the emcumberances/frustration of communicating with different generations? What are the benefits of intergenearational dialogue and how can it be accomplished?
<p>Fellowship</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As a pastor, I was allowed to be "normal", to take off my pastoral HATS! 2. Strangers have become family. 3. Different ages and ways of viewing and interpreting life. 4. Good to hear gender differences and understandings. For instance, I never considered the effect of referring to God as He has on women until you explained. Your explanation of abuse and inclusive language also helped me see the advantages of women pastors. It seems that women are more concerned with the feelings of members, nurturers by nature. 			
<p>Material(s)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Having materials make learning easier. 2. The TV/VCR and stereo are things that youth like a lot. 3. The project seemed legitimate because supplies were readily available and the classes organized. 			

Group Evaluation

Positive Aspects of the Project	Areas of Improvement	Elements that could Enhance the Project	Theories: What are the emcumberances/frustration of communicating with different generations? What are the benefits of intergeneational dialogue and how can it be accomplished?
<p>General</p> <p>Because I was encouraged, I feel like I can lead a group like this.</p> <p>This covenant group is a good way to bring non-churched people in. Not into church membership necessarily, but into thinking church folk care about others.</p> <p>I think it was the bomb! I could speak up and not get punished. I was taught how to say things respectfully.</p> <p>I learned more about myself and how to deal with everyday life.</p> <p>I learned about segregation.</p> <p>Worship and fellowship; learning to grow with your family and others.</p> <p>I learned patience.</p> <p>We were a part of the happiness of our project leader. We celebrated with her when she got engaged.</p> <p>Family isn't limited to blood kin.</p> <p>I learned to look for God in ordinary, everyday existence.</p> <p>Everyone had a chance to be heard. When someone got out of line, you put us in our place. You were nice about it but we knew</p>			

Group Evaluation

Positive Aspects of the Project	Areas of Improvement	Elements that could Enhance the Project	Theories: What are the emcumberances/frustration of communicating with different generations? What are the benefits of intergenearational dialogue and how can it be accomplished?
<p>you meant business.</p> <p>I like playing</p>			

Appendix B
St. Luke Tabernacle
Cycle I Curriculum Design

St. Luke Tabernacle Christian Education Plan Cycle I			
Week	Topic	Facilitator	Time
1 2/9/01	Gathering Prayer Introductions Fellowship Opportunities	Pastor E & Sis. J M Sis. Y B	7:00 PM
	Overview: Christian Education Plan - Cycle I A. Ten Week Cycle B. Disciplines of the Spirit C. Survey of the Bible 1. Old Testament 2. New Testament D. Question/Answer Period	Rev. I B	7:35
	Disciplines of the Spirit A. Overview 1. Journaling 2. Scripture Reading 3. Prayer a. Invocation b. Supplication c. Benediction d. Grace e. Intercession f. Healing g. Praying in Response to God's "No" 4. Stewardship a. Time b. Talent c. Treasure 5. Fasting 6. Music for the Journey 7. Looking for the Sacred in the Ordinary B. Journaling 1. Discipline 2. Record of Growth	Rev. L. Hickmon Evans	8:00
	Dismissal	Pastor E	8:50

St. Luke Tabernacle
Christian Education Plan
Cycle I

Week	Topic	Facilitator	Time
2	Gathering and Prayer	Pastor E	7:00 PM
2/16/01	Disciplines of the Spirit: Scripture Reading <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Divisions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Old Testament b. New Testament 2. Practice of Reading the Bible <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Lectio Domino b. 1 Years Study Guide c. Spirit Directed 3. Studying Scriptural Passages <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. b. c. d. e. 	Pastor E	7:10
	Survey of the Old Testament <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overview (handout) 2. Genres <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Law/Torah/Pentateuch b. History c. Wisdom d. Prophetic e. Apocalyptic 3. Law/Torah/Pentateuch <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Genesis b. Exodus c. Leviticus d. Numbers e. Deuteronomy 4. Homework Assignment 	Rev. Hickmon Evans	8:00
	Adjournment	Pastor E	8:50

St. Luke Tabernacle
Christian Education Plan
Cycle I

Week	Topic	Facilitator	Time
3	Gathering and Prayer	Pastor E	7:00 PM
3/2/01	Disciplines of the Spirit: Prayer 1. Biblical Mandate 2. Types <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Invocation b. Supplication c. Intercession d. Thanksgiving e. Benediction f. Grace g. Praying in Response to God's "NO" h. Healing 	Rev. R B	7:10
	Survey of the Old Testament: History 1. Overview 2. Historical Books <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Joshua b. Judges c. Ruth d. I/II Samuel e. I/II Kings f. I/II Chronicles g. Ezra h. Nehemiah i. Esther 3. Homework Assignment	Rev. Hickmon Evans	8:00
	Adjournment	Pastor E	8:50

St. Luke Tabernacle
Christian Education Plan
Cycle I

Week	Topic	Facilitator	Time
4 3/9/01	Gathering and Prayer	Pastor E	7:00 PM
	Disciplines of the Spirit: Stewardship 1. Overview 2. Elements of Stewardship a. Time b. Talent c. Treasure	Rev. & Deacon B	7:10
	Survey of the Old Testament: Wisdom 1. Overview 2. Wisdom Literature a. Job b. Psalms c. Proverbs d. Songs of Solomon e. Ecclesiastes f. Lamentations 3. Homework Assignment	Rev. Hickmon Evans	8:00
	Adjournment	Pastor E	8:50
5 3/16/01	Gathering and Prayer	Pastor E	7:00 PM
	Disciplines of the Spirit: Fasting 1. Purpose and Overview 2. Countenance and Disposition 3. The Practice of Fasting	Evangelist M	7:10
	Survey of the Old Testament: Prophets 1. Overview 2. Prophetic Books a. Isaiah b. Jeremiah c. Ezekiel d. Hosea e. Joel f. Amos g. Obadiah h. Jonah i. Micah j. Nahum k. Haggai l. Habakkuk m. Malachi n. Zechariah o. Zephaniah	Rev. Hickmon Evans	8:00

St. Luke Tabernacle
Christian Education Plan
Cycle I

Week	Topic	Facilitator	Time
6 3/23/01	Gathering and Worship	Pastor E	7:00 PM
	Disciplines of the Spirit: Music for the Journey 1. Overview 2. Cut from the same Cloth: Sacred and Secular Music 3. Types of Sacred Music a. Hymns b. Spirituals c. Gospel d. Note Singing e. Praise and Worship f. Contemporary Music (Rap) g. Classical	Pastor E Bro. D	7:10
	Survey of the Old Testament: Apocalyptic Literature 1. Overview 2. Apocalyptic Literature in the Bible a. Daniel b. Revelation 3. Assignment	Rev. Hickmon Evans	8:00
	Adjournment	Pastor E	8:50
7 4/6/01	Gathering and Prayer	Pastor E	7:00 PM
	Disciplines of the Spirit: Music for the Journey (Continued)	Bro. D	7:10
	Survey of the New Testament: Gospels 1. Overview 2. Synoptic Gospels + John a. Matthew b. Mark c. Luke	Rev. Hickmon Evans	8:00
	Adjournment		8:50

St. Luke Tabernacle
Christian Education Plan
Cycle I

Week	Topic	Facilitator	Time
8 4/13/01	Gathering and Grace	Pastor E	6:30 PM
	Christian Education through Fellowship 1. Meal 2. Movie 3. Moments of Sharing	Sis. Y B and Pastor E	6:40
	Adjournment	Pastor E	9:30

St. Luke Tabernacle
Christian Education Plan
Cycle I

Week	Topic	Facilitator	Time
9 4/20/01	Gathering and Prayer	Pastor E	7:00 PM
	Disciplines of the Spirit: Looking for the Sacred in the Ordinary 1. Overview 2. Individual/Group Activity a. Magazine b. Newspaper c. Conversation d. Television e. Music f. Drama	Sis. Y B	7:10
	Overview of the New Testament: Church History and Epistles 1. Overview 2. Church History a. Acts 3. Epistles (Pauline Corpus) a. Romans b. I/II Corinthians c. I/II Thessalonians d. Galatians e. Philippians f. Philemon 3. Assignment	Rev. Hickmon Evans	8:00
	Adjournment	Pastor E	8:50
10 5/4/01	Gathering and Prayer	Pastor E	7:00 PM
	Disciplines of the Spirit: A Personal Plan of Action	Pastor & Rev. E	7:10
	Survey of the New Testament: General Letters 1. Overview 2. General Letters	Rev. Hickmon Evans	8:00
	Adjournment	Pastor E	8:50

Appendix C
St. Luke Tabernacle
Organizational Materials

All events will take place at Baptist Temple Church, 1101 Clover. Please contact me to clarify and coordinate your assignments.

May God's blessings overtake you at your point of need.

St. Luke Tabernacle
Christian Education
Teacher Training

YOUR OWN THOUGHTS . . .

In the space provided below, write your thoughts on teaching:

1. Teaching is

2. Christian teaching is

Note: Refer to page____ before proceeding to question 3.

3. Christian teachers should have the following qualities

4. I am a Christian who has those qualities and also these

5. The single most important thing that any teacher must bring to his/her teaching is _____

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The church's education ministry has been embodied and lived in five (5) classical forms:

didache: teaching and learning
koinonia: community and communion
kerygma: proclamation of the Word of God
diakonia: service and outreach
leiturgia (liturgy): prayer and worship¹

Although the Christian Education Department/Ministry will work collaboratively with other departments and ministries, our task as a department is to engage in the didactic moments of teaching and learning in a classroom setting.

Maria Harris. Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989).

ELEMENTS OF A LESSON

PRAYER. Seek God for guidance and direction. God is faithful to show you the “what” and “how” of teaching the subject matter you wish to convey.
****NEVER TRY TO PREPARE FOR OR TEACH A LESSON TO GOD’S PEOPLE WITHOUT SEEKING GOD FIRST.**

OBJECTIVES. You must clearly identify exactly what points on the topic you want to make for your students. Your objectives should be:

- **Clear . . . not just words that you write but words that have meaning.**
- **Specific . . . not just general thoughts and ideas but definitive concepts.**
- **Limited . . . not more than three to four points that you want to get across to students.**
- **Understandable . . . not clear only to you but concepts that can be comprehended by others without detailed explanation.**
- **Pointed . . . not rambling, no more than ten to fifteen words each.**
- **Attainable . . . not so far reaching that they can not be accomplished within the allotted time, and in the teaching method chosen.**
- **Realistic . . . not empty, having no practical application for daily Christian living.**

Set your objectives before you prior to planning the lesson and before you get your resolve for teaching the lesson.

CONTENT. Knowing and securing the materials that will be used as the text lesson. The Bible is your first source, supplemented by other resource materials as needed to convey information. Your information should be accurate, support the Bible, and in keeping with your Christian principles.

METHOD. How do you plan to actually teach the lesson? What tools and equipment will you need? What will you say? How will you divide the content so that you will stay within your time limit? What will the students do? These are questions that you should answer as you plan to teach your lesson.

CONCLUSION. Every lesson should have a conclusion or a summary. When all is said and done the teacher and/or the class should be able to determine what was taught, and what has been learned. Each participant should be able to articulate what they have learned in clear and concise words.

EVALUATION. After the lesson has been taught, the students should be given the opportunity to evaluate of the class, the value of what they have been taught, and the teacher (knowledge, presentation, interaction, etc.).

ORDER YOUR LESSON

PRAYER

CONCLUSION

METHOD

EVALUATION

CONTENT

OBJECTIVES

Put the elements of a lesson
Into the proper order:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

In your own words write a simple
definition for each:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TEACHERS

Thou shalt put your who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ

Thou shalt be organized and accountable

Thou shalt have high expectations for your students and yourself

Thou shalt be open-minded and flexible but fixed in the Word

Thou shalt be an example of the Believer in everything you DO and SAY

Thou shalt be humble enough to seek and take advice

Thou shalt demonstrate Christian principles in your daily living

Thou shalt always be ready to promote the learning of God's Word

Thou shalt embrace the responsibility of being an educator for God

Thou shalt teach wholeheartedly and with power as unto the Lord

TO KEEP IN MIND

As a Christian education teacher you must always be mindful of the state of your students. In part you are responsible for ministering to the needs of your students through your compassion and understanding of who they are and what they need in addition to materials. This is should **NOT** be an awesome responsibility because it comes with the title of teacher.

AGE

GENDER

EXPERIENCES
(LIFE AND CHRISTIAN)

READING SKILLS

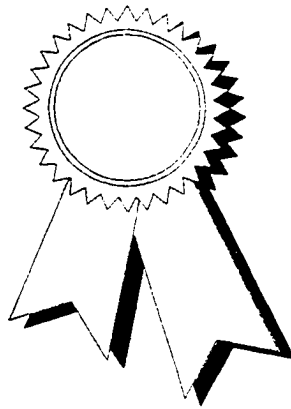
VERBAL SKILLS

TALKATIVE

SHY

SELF-ESTEEM

THANK YOU



Discipline of the Spirit: Journaling

Session Objective(s):

To introduce students to the concept of journaling as a spiritual discipline.

To make a journal entry after reflecting on a written meditation.

Agenda

Overview

The Purpose of Journaling

Journaling vs. Keeping a Diary

Journaling Practices and Approaches

Journaling Exercise

Question & Answer Period

Homework Assignment(s)

1. Introduction to the Bible
 - a. Read the table of contents of the Bible
 - b. Scan the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) and see if you can detect a theme.

Session Facilitator: Linda Hickmon Evans

Resources

Broyles, Anne, Journaling: A Spirit Journey (Nashville: Upper Room, 1988).

Cook, Suzan D. Johnson, ed., Sister to Sister: Devotions for and from African American Women (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1995).

Foster, Richard J. and James Bryan Smith, eds., Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

Wade-Gayles, Gloria, ed., My Soul is a Witness: African-American Women's Spirituality (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

Washington, James Melvin, ed., Conversations with God: Two Centuries of Prayers by African Americans (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994).

White, David Manning, comp., The Search for God, (New York: Paragon House, 1991).

Disciplines of the Spirit

Session Outline

I. Overview

Over the next nine weeks you will participate in two types of learning situations, one theoretical, the other practical. The theoretical aspect of your studies is an introduction to the Bible. In this survey of the Bible, the session facilitator will provide a sweeping overview of each book of the Bible and the particular category into which it falls. This survey or introduction to the Bible is not intended to be an in-depth study of the Bible. Rather, the approach takes into account that the experience of students will be varied. Some may have no knowledge of the Bible, while others possess varying degrees of knowledge. The purpose of the survey/overview is to provide an even foundation for all students in a manner that is basic enough to be inviting to the novice, while providing new insights to veteran Bible readers. When I classified this aspect of the learning experience as theoretical, I simply mean that this information, the survey of the Bible, is what we “*know*”, what informs the text we consider sacred, how and why the texts were written. On the other hand, the practical aspect goes beyond asking what we know to, what do we do with what we know.

It is not enough to have the Bible. As people confessing our human fragility and flaws, our goal is to live faithfully with God and neighbor. The practical aspect of your studies attends to helping us “*do*”. Doing in this case is living faithfully. To help us accomplish this “*doing faith*”, we will engage in the study **AND** practice of disciplines of the

spirit. We've heard people as, "are you saved?" What does that really mean and how does one get saved, stay saved and to what are we saved? Being saved means turning from a reliance on self to a reliance on and belief in God, the Creator of all that is good. The goal of salvation is to live faithfully with God and the ultimate reward for living faithfully is eternal life devoid of suffering, worry, and other human experiences that create stresses and strains.

The goal of the sessions on disciplines of the spirit is to provide tools for each individual to live faithfully with God. Another way of talking about this is learning how to live ones faith on a daily basis in all aspects of life. In African traditional religion, there is no distinction between the sacred and the sacred. All of life is religious.

While there are many ways to strengthen your relationship with God, seven will be covered in Cycle I, they are:

1. Journaling
2. Scripture Reading
3. Prayer
4. Stewardship
5. Fasting
6. Music for the Journey
7. Looking for the Sacred in the Ordinary

II. The Purpose of Journaling

A. Discipline

- ⊗ By definition, discipline entails training that molds or perfects mental faculties or moral character.

- ✉ It also refers to an orderly pattern of behavior.
- ✉ In the context or setting of journaling as a spiritual discipline, the practice is aimed at molding the writer as a Christian in faithful relationship with God. The method for establishing the relationship is through writing on your experience(s) of God and reflecting on those experiences as a form of thanksgiving. Reflecting on your experiences with God as mediated through the process of journaling also provides the basis for continued growth in God.

B. Record of Growth

- ✉ Scripture (I Corinthians 15:46) tells us that we should first attend to that which is natural or carnal then to spiritual matters.
- ✉ As it relates to journaling, there is both natural and spiritual growth. With repetition, writing, language and analytical skills improve as the spiritual bond is strengthened between the writer and God.

III. Journaling vs. Keeping a Diary

- ✉ Journaling and keeping a diary are similar in that they both are personal recordings of your experiences, innermost thoughts and feelings, held in a confidential manner.
- ✉ As a spiritual discipline, journaling differs from a diary because of the focus of the entries. As a spiritual discipline, not merely a recording of life's events, the journal is a spiritual exercise and entries should be recordings of your encounter with God directly and as mediated through people and events.
- ✉ It is vitally important that you review and reflect upon your journal regularly. In this way you will be strengthened and encouraged as you see your growth in God or are able to identify your growing edges.

IV. Journaling Practices and Approaches

- ✉ If you are attempting journaling for the first time, the exercise should be considered an experiment. It takes time to perfect the discipline.
- ✉ As your faith, skills and confidence increase, I am sure you'll look back over your first entries with amazement at your growth.

- ☒ Date all entries.
- ☒ One of your earliest decisions in the journaling process is: when to make journaling entries.

Options include:

1. First thing in the morning based on:
 - a. What happened the day before.
 - b. Reflection on what you anticipate your day being.
 - c. A prayer that will help you through the trials of the day.
 - d. Other
2. Last thing before going to bed because it serves as a recap of the event's of the day.
3. Other times of the day that are convenient to your schedule.

- ☒ Approaches to journaling or what guides/informs your process.
Options include:

1. Events that occur in your **daily life** and your theological reflection (God's role, presence, direction) on those experiences.
2. In response to scripture – your thoughts, questions or revelations on texts you've read.
3. Guided meditations (see resources list on back of agenda) are generally collections of prayers, reflections, meditations, etc., of renowned theologians, teachers or pastors. Frequently, they reflect a particular style of the aforementioned by ordinary folk like us. Your entries should reflect thoughts or revelations generated by the meditations.
4. Dreams are hard to interpret for the non-professional therapist. You may be able to discern a pattern to your dreams by writing them down, reflecting on them and revelations from God. Often God works through dreams to warn us of impending events, etc.

5. Your journal entries may also be generated from other readings beside religious/spiritual mediations. Poems and newspapers are good sources of inspiration. In a later session you will engage in activities that assist you by look for the sacred in the ordinary.
 6. Normally, we converse with people daily. God frequently is mediated in our encounters with others. Be attentive to the moving of the Spirit.
-

Journaling Exercise

For your first entry in your journal, read the following meditations and write your thoughts about one in your journal.

Happy Journaling!

Meditation 1: A Prayer for the Mourner's Bench

Written in 1867 by an anonymous (unknown) "Colored" Woman

O Father Almighty, O sweet Jesus, most glorified King, will you be so pleased to come dis way and put you eye on dese poor mourners? O sweet Jesus, ain't you the Daniel God? Didn't you deliber de tree {three} chillun from the fiery furnis? Didn't you heah {hear} Jonah cry in de belly ub de whale? O, if dere be one seeking' mourner here dis afternoon, if dere be one sinkin' Peter, if dere be one weepin' Mary, if dere be one doubtin' Thomas, won't you be pleased to come and deliber 'em? Won't you mount your Gospel hoss, an' ride roun' de souls of dese yere mourners, and say, "Go in peace and sin no moah?" Won't you be so pleased to come wid de love in one han' and de fan in the odder han', to fan away doubts? Won't you be so pleased to shake dese here souls over hell, an' not let 'em fall in! Amen.²

Meditation 2: My State of Indecision

Written by St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo who was born in North Africa in 354

I was held back by all my old attachments. They plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, "Are you going to dismiss us? From this moment we shall never be with you again, for ever and ever. From this moment on you will never again be allowed to do this thing or that." What was it, my God, when they whispered "this thing or that"? Things so sordid and shameful that I beg you in your mercy to keep the soul of your servant from them!

These voices, as I heard them, seemed less than half as loud as they had been before. They no longer barred my way, but their mutterings seemed to reach me from behind, trying to make me turn my head when I wanted to go forward. Yet, in my state of indecision, they kept me from tearing myself away, from shaking myself free of them and leaping across the barrier to the other side where you were calling me. Habit was too strong for me when it asked, "Do you think you can live without these."³

²James Melvin Washington, ed., Conversations with God: Two Centuries of Prayers by African Americans (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994).

³ David Manning White, comp., The Search for God, (New York: Paragon House, 1991).

Introduction to the Old Testament

Session Objective(s):

1. To acquaint students with the terms canon and genre.
2. To introduce students to the canon of the Old Testament by divisions and themes.
3. To introduce students to the first five books of the Old Testament know as Law, Torah(Hebrew) or Pentateuch (Greek).

Agenda

Homework Report (10 minutes maximum)

Overview

Old Testament Canon
with handout

Introduction to the Law/Torah/Pentateuch

- ☒ Genesis
- ☒ Exodus
- ☒ Leviticus
- ☒ Numbers
- ☒ Deuteronomy

Question & Answer Period

Homework Assignment

1. Genesis – Locate the passage that details how many animals were taken aboard the ark Noah built and why.
2. Exodus – What is the Ark of the Covenant and why is it significant?
3. Leviticus – What is the significance of the scapegoat and at what time in the life of Israel?

4. Numbers – What is the order of encampment and marching for the Israelites and what were their respective standards.
5. Deuteronomy – The Israelites/Hebrews were instructed to place a mezuzah on the door of their homes. The practice continues today among Jews. What is written on the scrolls housed in the mezuzah and speculate why.

Resources

Reference Books:

Bible (Authorized Version: KJV, NKJV, NRSV, RSV, NEB)

Bible Concordance

Bible Dictionary

Bible Commentaries (written as individual books or collections: i.e., Interpreter's, Anchor)

Bible Atlas

Session Facilitator: Linda Hickmon Evans

I. Overview

You learned earlier this evening that the Christian Bible, particularly the English versions contain two divisions, Old Testament and New Testament. In this session and others over the next four weeks, we will concentrate on the Old Testament canon, or the Hebrew Bible.

The word canon comes from the Greek for “rule” or “measure”. The Hebrew canon or Old Testament is the authorized list of sacred books that have “measured up” to the standards set by the Jewish community. There are four characteristics of canonicity:

- I. The books are accepted as having divine authority.
- II. The number of books is fixed.
- III. The period of time within which the books originated is limited.
- IV. The text is regarded as fixed and unalterable.

The Hebrew canon was solidified in A.D.90, when a group of Jewish rabbis met at Jamnia, which is near Joppa on the coastal plain of Israel. This gathering came to be known as the Council of Jamnia. The rabbis fixed the number of books at twenty-four, which corresponds to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

The books of the Hebrew canon are ordered differently than that of the Christian canon. The original texts were written on a single scroll that varied in lengths that ranged between twenty-five to thirty feet long. The Hebrew canon is distributed in this way:

- I. Law (Torah) – five books

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy

I. The Prophets (Nebi'im) – eight books

1. Former Prophets (constitute one scroll)
 - A. Joshua
 - B. Judges
 - C. I and II Samuel
 - D. I and II Kings
1. Latter Prophets (occupy a scroll each)
 - A. Major (denoting length)
 - i. Isaiah
 - ii. Jeremiah
 - iii. Ezekiel
 - A. Minor or The Twelve (constitute a single scroll and are thus shorter in length)
 - i. Hosea
 - ii. Joel
 - iii. Amos
 - iv. Obadiah
 - v. Jonah
 - vi. Micah
 - vii. Nahum
 - viii. Habakkuk
 - ix. Zephaniah
 - x. Haggai
 - xi. Zechariah
 - xii. Malachi

I. The Writings (Kethubim) – eleven books

1. Psalms
2. Proverbs
3. Job
4. Song of Songs/Solomon
5. Ruth
6. Lamentations
7. Ecclesiastes

8. Esther
9. Daniel
10. Ezra-Nehemiah
11. I and II Chronicles

Torah was probably given its final form by 400 B. C. Much of the prophetic collection was fixed by 200 B. C. At Jamnia, the rabbinical debates concerned the division of texts known as the Writings. The rabbis used the principle of harmony with the written Torah in evaluating problem texts. They included no books that were known to have been written after Malachi, or after 400 B. C., because the rabbis believed that with the death of the Restoration prophets, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel. They rejected all books that were originally written in Greek.

Two primary reasons that the rabbis defined which books were sacred, was (1) so Jews would not be misled by Christian writings which had begun to surface, and (2) with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the historic sanctuary of the Jews was gone. Sacred writings became more urgent with the removal of the temple – the cultic center and heart of Judaism.

The Alexandrian canon came into existence in the following way. Around 275 B.C., seventy rabbis in Alexandria sat down in seventy different rooms with the Hebrew Scriptures. Their task was to translate these texts into Greek, the language of the Jews in Alexandria. Miraculously, their translations were identical – the seventy rabbis arrived at Greek translations that were exactly the same. This Alexandrian or Greek Old Testament is known

as the Septuagint (Greek for seventy), abbreviated by the Roman numerals LXX.¹

As we discuss the Hebrew canon, it is important to bear some things in minds.

- ✘ The history of Israel can be divided roughly into three categories: Pre-exilic (before 586 B.C.), Exilic (586 – 538 B.C.), and Post-exilic (538 B.C. and after)
- ✘ Israel existed along side other cultures whose religious practices differed.
- ✘ Characteristics of ancient religions of the Near East:
 - Polytheistic (many gods) – organized into pantheons or groups of gods headed by a male (father) figure and his consort (mother) figure.
 - Concerned with fertility, which was the role of the mother goddess.
 - Deities are portrayed as having human body forms (anthropomorphic). It should be noted that idols and gods are not the same except in Egypt where animals symbolized gods.
 - There is a close association with state and political authority. Separation of church and state is a modern concept. (Israel – theocracy; Pharaoh – deity/priest)
 - Mythological, which explains ultimate power.

II. Introduction to the Law (Torah: Hebrew – Pentateuch: Greek)

Five books constitute the Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These books form the basis of community identity and the laws, which directs and orders life within the community. Even though the overarching theme of these books is law, each book consists of multiple genres. Genre means “kinds” or “sorts”. Therefore, there are different “kinds” of stories in each book.

I. Genesis – beginning

¹ Celia Brewer Marshall. A Guide Through the Old Testament (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989).

1. Two broad genres
 - A. Primeval or Creation Stories (1-11)
 - B. Patriarchal or Family History (12-50)
1. Other central themes or genres
 - A. Blessing
 - B. Election
 - C. Divine Promises
 - D. Human strife
 - E. Providence of God
- I. Exodus – a going out or exiting
 1. Two broad genres
 - A. Delivery from Slavery
 - B. Giving of the law at Sinai
 1. Other central themes or genres
 - A. Election
 - B. Promise
- I. Leviticus – is a book of laws
 1. Types of laws
 - A. Varieties of sacrifice and offerings
 - B. Priestly ordinations
 - C. Dietary regulations
 - D. Defilement and cleansing
 - E. Festival
 - F. Proper sexual relations
 - G. Community and stranger
 - H. Holy items and seasons
 - I. Sabbath
 - J. Jubilee
- I. Numbers – reckoning
 1. Central Themes
 - A. The Lord's care for and guidance of Israel
 - B. The people's willful resistance, ingratitude, rebellion and lack of faith
 - C. Censuses
- I. Deuteronomy – second law
 1. Second book that contain laws pertaining to:
 - A. Worshipping one God in a central location
 - B. Caring for the land
 - C. Kingship
 - D. Priesthood
 - E. Family life

- F. Holy war
- G. True and false prophecy
- H. Tithing
- 1. Final speech of Moses

Disciplines of the Spirit: Scripture Reading

A SHORT PLAN FOR STUDYING BIBLE PASSAGES

Step One: What is the Bible Passage You Are Studying?

There are no hard fast rules regarding the proper length of a Bible passage to study. However, each study passage should contain a complete thought or idea. Sometimes that thought will be contained in a single verse, and at other times it will require a stanza, paragraph or an entire chapter. If you would like to begin with a simply defined passage, try one of Jesus' parables.

Step Two: Read the Passage Carefully, Word for Word

It is important to try to read the passage as if you have never read it before. Too often we will actually skim through a familiar passage assuming that we know what is important to see and miss the hidden treasures in it. If there are any unfamiliar terms or words, write them down for later study. Do not be afraid to ask questions of the text. It might even be helpful to read the passage aloud slowly. Look for the meaning beneath the surface.

Step Three: Investigate Key Terms

Many of the terms used in the Bible are deceptive. You might think you know what they mean, but you may miss out on what the words may have meant in the original Hebrew or Greek. Here is where reference works will be helpful. A theological wordbook is a useful tool at this point. In addition a dictionary of the Bible would also be helpful. Write down what you find out and try to determine how it helps you understand the passage you are studying.

Step Four: Clarify the Literary Context

It is important to remember that the passage that you are studying always follows a passage and precedes a passage. If you are studying a verse, read the verse before and the verse after the one you are studying. If you are studying a paragraph, read the paragraph before and after the one you are studying. Often the meaning of a passage is determined by what comes before and what comes after it. If we do not pay attention to the literary context, we can completely misunderstand the meaning of a passage.

Step Five: Clarify the Canonical Context

Canon refers to the books officially recognized a part of the Bible. It is also

important to note that the passage under study is part of the entire Bible, and that its meaning may be influenced by its relation to the Bible as a whole. That is, it is important to know whether the basic idea of the passage under study is found elsewhere in the Bible. Do the major words and terms have the same meaning in all circumstances. Here an important resource is a study Bible. A study Bible will have numerous cross references. Look up all of the listed cross references related to the study passage. Another important resource is a concordance of the Bible. A concordance will let you know wherever a term is found in the Bible. It will also distinguish between meanings in the original language which may not appear in English. For example, in English there is only one word *to know*. In Spanish, French, and German there are at least two words which mean *to know*, and their meanings are different. Ask about the meanings of the key words in the passage, and where they appear elsewhere in the Bible.

Step Six: Clarify the Historical and Geographical Context

Our understanding of the Bible is enhanced by knowing something about the situation in which it was written. Who wrote the passage under study? When? Where? What was going on at the time? Suppose you were studying a passage in Jeremiah. It would be important to know that Jeremiah was a prophet whose career spanned forty years (about 626-586 B.C) and that the Babylonian empire was about to crush the people of Judah and lead them into captivity. Many Bibles will provide some of this information at the beginning of a book. A helpful resource is a good Biblical commentary. Commentaries provide brief introductions to and interpretations of the books of the Bible. It is also helpful to locate the place to which the passage refers on a map. Some bibles have maps included, or you can find them in a Bible Atlas. Knowing the *where* and *when* can assist in understanding the meaning of the passage under study.

Step Seven: State the Original Meaning of the Passage

Here is where your study begins to pay off. Write down in your own words what you think the original meaning of passage was for its original listeners or readers. Take some time to think this through. Ask yourself, "What did it mean for them?"

Step Eight: What Does the Passage Mean Today?

Here is the final payoff of your study. Ask yourself, "How is the world that I live in like that described in the passage under study?" "In what ways am I or we similar to the characters described in the passage?" "How are we like the audience addressed in this passage?" "How are their problems like our problems?" "How is the Good News conveyed in this passage Good News for us?" The questions are not limited to those above. Find your own questions. Remember, when looking for the meaning of the passage for you today, there are no right or wrong answers; only answers that are meaningful and answers that are not. If you want to arrive at more meaningful answers regarding the Bible and your life, try in-depth Bible study. You will be richly blessed.

GROUP STUDY EXERCISE

The class will be divided into groups of no more than five persons. Each group will select a passage of scripture from the list provided by the instructor. The group will spend forty minutes in study moving through the steps suggested above. At the end of the forty minute period each group will identify the passage under study and the results of steps seven and eight of the study plan. General responses will be elicited. The session will conclude with corporate prayer.

Rev. James H. Evans, Jr., Ph.D., Litt.D.

St. Luke Tabernacle
Christian Education Evaluation Form

ABOUT THE CLASS

Topic/Event: _____ Date: _____

Length of Class/Event: _____ Was the time allotted appropriate? Yes _____ No _____

If you have additional comments about the length of the class/event, please share them with us.

Was there enough material/supplies/activities for everyone in attendance? Yes _____
No _____

Were the materials/supplies/activities well organized? Yes _____ No _____

Did the class/activity start at the time advertised? Yes _____ No _____

Did the class/activity end at the time advertised? Yes _____ No _____

What new information did you learn or what did you like best about the class/activity?

What did you like least of all about the class/activity?

What types of classes/activities would you like to see offered?

ABOUT THE SPACE

Was the room where your class/activity held comfortable (temperature, size, light, security, size and quantity of furniture, spacious)? Please comment on your learning environment.

ABOUT THE TEACHER/PRESENTER/ACTIVITY LEADER

Teacher/Activity Leader: _____

Did the teacher/activity leader start the class/activity on time? Yes ____ No ____ . If s/he did not, was it something s/he could control? Yes ____ No ____

Was the teacher/activity leader well prepared? Yes ____ No ____

Was the teacher/activity leader knowledgeable about her/his topic/activity? Yes ____ No ____ . Additional comments.

Were the materials/activity appropriate for the session? Yes ____ No ____

Did the learning environment created by the teacher/presenter feel like safe space; a place where you and your colleagues could be yourselves? Please comment.

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